

The House of Yost



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THE HOUSE OF YOST

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House of Yost

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THE HOUSE OF YOST

CHAPTER I

WHITSUNDAY turned out clear and warm, so nearly everyone could go. As early as eight o'clock parties of young people had set out walking; they came toward the same point from all directions, along the grass-bordered roads; and carriages followed one another over the hills in the northern part of Berks County, where a mile is equal to about a mile and a half in flatter parts of the world. By the time the bell began to ring there was a sociable crowd under the button-ball and horse-chestnut trees that shaded the church.

Yost's Church was built of bluish stone dug from the nearest hill: in the sunlight the carved white woodwork looked like ivory. Inside it was blue and white, with a wine-glass pulpit, quartered oak galleries and fluted pillars, all carved long ago by hands that caressed their work. The three doorways, now wide open, showed lovely views to east, west and north. According to custom the men should have been on one side of the aisle, the women on the other; but today people found places where they could, the pews

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which seated four comfortably now holding five, or five and a child. It was inconvenient that the fashions of that year broadened instead of elongating the female form. All who had the slightest claim to sit with the choir did so, including some whom nobody ever suspected could sing. In the short pews on each side of the altar, rows of grandparents assembled; and the little children were allowed to walk about in the aisles. Everybody was there.

Near the west door, in sight of the congregation, stood a marble monument with the figure of an angel. A garland of country roses drooped from its arms; roses covered the grave; and the grass for some distance around was almost hidden under flowers.

George Stroh, sitting at the organ, could see the angel. With his head bent and his hands hanging between his knees he was thinking, "Many were his friends, and a few had his love; but he is my father."

He glanced at the elderly minister, whose face was bitter with conscious mediocrity.

"This poor old fellow merely occupies the pulpit. No wonder he objected to a memorial service. Father died seventeen years ago; but today he is here among his people like a living man."

When he looked across the church George saw one figure distinguished among all the crowd, the most imposing person there, his mother. As her position required, Christiana Stroh's black silk and bonnet trimmed with violets were very handsome. Although

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hundreds of her acquaintances had been observing her, she did not seem to know it; her expression was abstracted and gentle.

“ I wonder whether Mother feels at all proud,” he thought.

In a few minutes his new Whitsunday hymn would be sung for the first time. To have a hymn made especially for them gratified the music-loving Pennsylvania Germans; and they were also delighted with the new organ, their beloved pastor’s memorial, presented by his son; so the congregational singing had been like cheering. After the responses the minister at last sat down, and the people composed themselves. Throats were cleared, legs were crossed, children were frowned at until they became petrified. A profound silence followed.

George adjusted his cuffs above his broad, long-thumbed hands; a nervous smile drew up his lips, and made him look like a faun. Glancing masterfully over the choir, he saw them all expecting him to begin; and Mary Shell, the soprano, had taken her place beside him and was ready. He played the prelude; they began to sing.

Praise ye the Lord! As praised Him of old in Jerusalem
Those who in faith assembled with one accord.
Then came the wind, and the flames of His spirit were over
them.

Now o’er your hearts comes His fatherly love. Praise
the Lord!

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Flames he dispatched to the earth on that day as His
messengers.

Loosed were the tongues of His children, and great
was the wonder.

Greater the diurnal miracle wrought for us laborers:

Sunshine and starlight and moonrise, the snow and the
thunder.

Father divine! Through Thy Heavens in splendor
proceeding,

Seedtime arrives and the harvests are ripe at Thy call:
Hatred nor love from us trivial creatures impeding,

Who, shouldst Thou cease to regard us, would be not
at all.

Praise ye the Lord! For with life and with light He
endows us.

Need hath He none of the worship of endable days.
Transient and weak as we are, He with gratitude bows us, —
Ultimate grace, — in that He permits us to praise.

As the chords marched on, George felt that he was
no more than a channel for the song. For a few
moments he loved his artless lines. Before the vibra-
tion of the last notes had ceased he heard approving
whispers. Many in the congregation could not under-
stand the English words, but the music came home to
everyone. Two or three of the women who held Paul
Stroh in grateful remembrance were weeping.

To have all those people so near, with their broad
smiles and their opinions, suddenly became very irk-
some. The musician rose to his feet with an undis-
guised sigh. He was tall when he stood up. After
whispering to Mary Shell, who looked dubious, he

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proceeded along the gallery and down the steps and out. Everybody watched, but he did not hurry, and he appeared so unconscious, so estimable, that he made it seem quite proper to leave the church at the beginning of the sermon.

Out in the graveyard, songs of the brown thrasher and the oriole and the soft noise of the Northkill flowing over stones mingled with the hymns; and in every direction there was a hill, near or far. Peonies and fleur-de-lis were blooming white and purple, and strips of shade from the evergreens lay across the grass on a multitude of graves. Over old soldiers weather-faded flags waved; brown stone markers, worn smooth, told nothing except that some one had wanted some one to be remembered; friendless mounds were covered with myrtle, or drifts of mountain-pink now past its prime.

George threw himself down under a red cedar and lay perfectly still. The place he had chosen for rest was in the midst of his family.

On a marble monument surmounted by an urn was inscribed,

GEORGE YOST

BORN 1781, DIED 1851

Christiana, the daughter of a second wife, was his only child. The Yost family was always small. Many acres had been added to the estate by him, and he had introduced the handsome Holstein cattle that were bred there.

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A granite slab with a weeping willow in bas-relief commemorated,

GEORGE YOST

BORN 1752, DIED 1826

After plenty of adventures as a rifle-man in the Continental army, and three wounds, that George Yost had settled down to conserve; he had drained meadows, planted black walnut trees and locust trees, and built the stone bridge over the Northkill. Also he had had money-sense. The greater part of the principal now invested in Christiana's name had been accumulated in his time.

Red clover growing around a red sandstone marker touched the winged death's-head half worn away, and stood higher than the name;

JOHANN GEORG YOST

BORN 1726, DIED 1803

This was the pioneer. Not disheartened by the ocean or the wilderness, not dislodged by Indians raiding again and again across the mountains, he cleared his grant of land. His horses pulled wagons heaped with food and grain and clothing over the heavy roads to Washington's troops. He needed a blacksmith's shop and a shoemaker's shop and a general store; and Middleport grew up around them. He built the church as a thank-offering. It was said that he left the

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interesting world reluctantly, that he came back sometimes, that he walked westward on a moonlight night, across the stone bridge and along the road to Yost's, to see how things were going. Several young girls declared they had met him, and so did one old man who remembered him in life, sitting in the Yost pew, asleep.

When his descendant, George Stroh, heard Mary Shell's spirited step he did not stir except to raise his eyes. As she came across the grass, delicate shadows of the cedar branches moved over her. She was a little thing, and very trim, with yellow flowers in her black hat, and a black and white checked gown. Braids of light brown hair, pinned flat, quite covered the back of her head; her black brows were fine, her complexion white.

"Well?" George said.

"Well?"

They did not use the dialect. When they were on good terms they spoke English because most of the neighbors could not understand it.

George asked, "Didn't they like my hymn?"

"If they hadn't been in church they would have applauded."

"Are they pleased with the organ, do you think?"

"Proud."

"It all went well, didn't it?"

Since he said no more and contemplated the heavens, she sat down comfortably, watching him with amusement out of the corner of her eye. His short, curly

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beard sparkled red and yellow in the sunlight; his variable irises had become a mild hazel; owing to the depth of the orbit the line from the temple to the corner of the mouth was remarkably fine.

Abruptly, as if to get away from something in her own mind, she asked, "Didn't you want to hear the eulogy? "

"They can't tell me anything I don't know about father. Do you remember my father? "

"I can see him now, riding his cream-colored horse, in the midst of bright sunshine. He was stately."

"Do you remember the day of the funeral? "

"Yes. The bell tolled, and you came walking at the head of the procession with your mother. It rained a little. When the coffin stood open beside the grave he faced the sky. Oh, how the people mourned! He was young to die."

"Thirty-nine."

"In the last week or two I have heard so many stories about him: how wonderful he was with those who came to him in trouble, especially if their minds were not at rest. Like a saint he must have been."

"That's what I ought to live up to."

So that he need not feel obliged to talk while in this mood, she moved away after a moment across the grass path, gathered two or three yellow pansies, and read some of the gravestones.

After a while she said, "Our dear old Mr. Sohl! I am going to clean this marble as soon as I can. The little harp above his name is almost black. I hope he

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has a gold one now, and can play as well as he wants to play."

"He worked hard at our singing-lessons. Poor old Sohl! Do you remember his show piece, that funeral march? It was rumbled out over more than one jolly grandfather, who in life would have preferred, 'I lost my stocking at Lauterbach.'"

"George, don't you regret that you stopped studying music? There was nothing to make you come back here."

"It's good enough for me at Yost's. Hear that oven-bird calling, 'Teacher!'"

"Look at the yellow-footed turtle. Exactly like the one you gave me that day at catechistical class. Do you remember?" She walked back to him. "It lived in our garden for years. When I came home from school to stay it was still living."

There was a long, friendly silence.

"I think it's time to go."

"Mary, your eyes are blue with a very dark blue ring around them."

"What makes you say such a silly thing?"

"There are many things I could say — to no one but you," he answered, after rising to his feet.

"Why, what has come over you?" His movement was suave, but she found she could not free her hand. "Now I *am* going!"

"I couldn't get on without you at all."

Because she was thinking, "All this means nothing," she made him no reply.

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“ Will you go for a drive this afternoon? ”

“ No, indeed I won't.”

“ With my new horses? You haven't seen them. Bays with black points.”

“ Oh, listen! The minister has stopped.”

“ This afternoon? ” he repeated, scarcely above a whisper.

“ Yes. Do hurry! ” — “ Can it mean anything to him? ” she questioned herself.

She did not know how to meet this change in their long, placid friendship; and it was changing at this very moment. Rapid though his look was, she clearly perceived that he appraised her.

“ Not that! Not that! ” she thought; but the touch of his lips was swift.

“ Run! ” she said, bravely laughing.

She felt that before long she should want to cry; but now, watching him, she was very happy. He ran like a wind hound toward the church; he leaped the graves.

CHAPTER II

NOT Mary Shell but the Seven Stars had the advantage of George's company. After such a morning he wanted a complete change.

"I can take her driving any time," he thought.

When he was ready to start out he found two little boys at play in his carriage, which had been left outside the carriage-house. Dusty smears from their shoes were on the cushions; but he did not scold them when they stood before him wriggling and rubbing one leg with the other foot. He knew what they wanted, and offered them a ride. That made them happy.

"Don't you wish we had some pretzels?" one of them said, as they drove along.

"That's a pretzel-tree."

He pointed with his whip. The width of a field away the branchless trunk of a dead cedar was standing covered with vines; the loose tendrils looked as if pretzels might be expected of them. The little fellows had almost reached it when he started his horse, and shouted, "I see the farmer coming with a gun."

Squealing and tumbling through the fence, they ran after him as fast as their legs could go. Both had torn their Sunday stockings.

"Green pretzels were hanging on the tree," said the smaller boy, who was crying.

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"There might have been a few ripe ones on the ground, but we didn't get any," the other added, out of breath.

"At the store, pretzels are ripe all the year round," George said; and he tossed a quarter into the road, and drove off laughing.

He had to go a long way, for the recreation he wanted could not be found anywhere near Yost's on a Sunday. But that did not matter to him; he was happy. The memorial service pleased him, although his few fond minutes of enthusiasm over his hymn were entirely past. He had spent several years away at school and several more studying music in Philadelphia, and he possessed some standards. He knew that his own performance was nothing; still he thought often of the career he might have had. Now as always there was great satisfaction in the idea that he could afford to cast even all that aside.

"I had my free choice," he said to himself.

Momentarily he was filled with elation. Natural obstacles seemed to dwindle, every-day limitations to give way; he felt he could do anything.

"I gave up that for this. Oh, what rich country!"

White road and rolling fields, all the world that he could see, was overshadowed by the Blue Mountain. Its dark crest met the northern sky tranquilly. Along the side of the ridge, miles long, covered with sunlit forests, the curve of one slope melted into another, farther and still farther away. From among the clover came the soft calls of partridges. All the little

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creeks were full. Here and there against green trees appeared a blossoming dogwood, misty white, casting lace-like shadows.

“Here no one goes hungry,” he thought. “I would not leave this. No career would be worth it. And where is there another place like Yost’s?”

He took off his hat, felt the sunshine pouring on his head, and breathed deeply. At the moment the sweet air smelt of rushes.

“It’s time I thought of marrying. She needn’t be wealthy, we have plenty; but she must appear well, and be able to understand things. Strong too, to make a good mother; and handsome. Handsome! I want my wife to be like her —.”

It was natural for him to think of his lady on this day so closely connected with the past. He thought of her often. There had been little in his life so far to make him change his ideals. One spring evening, while his father was living and strangers anxious to tell their troubles were often seen at Yost’s, he had come upon her, a tall young woman walking along the Northkill road. It was the first time in his life that he had noticed the beauty of a face. He had made advances to a boy and a lame rat-terrier following her, but the boy was stand-offish and the dog snapped; after which they all went toward the house, disappearing from him forever.

“No one said anything about them, and neither did I. She must have been lovely if a little fellow did not forget her; but it was not only her bright eyes and

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hair. There on our road she appeared strange, different from anyone I had ever seen; and warm — ! I wanted to go to her, and be near her. I suppose I was lonesome. She is growing old now, if she is not dead. My pretty lady! ”

He gazed up at the brilliant sky and at the sun.

“ I can almost see through. I'd like Father to hear me sing the hymn. I am fortunate.”

Now approaching a well-known crossroad, he went dashing around the corner, and there was the Seven Stars. It looked gloomy, plastered dark yellow, and shaded by catalpas with sprawling leaves. Alone on the porch, with his slippers propped against a pillar, sat the landlord, Nicholas Siess, a bulky, silver-headed man in a white shirt and trousers. He always enunciated impressively, in a deep voice, no matter what he said.

“ No, this weather is not good,” he replied to George. “ It's not seasonable, and it makes me sweat so. Go in. You will find plenty of company.”

On days when George might be expected, Flossy, the daughter of the establishment, never strayed far from a window, and she was hovering in the hall now. Her red cheeks were tough as rubber, but she had a heart soft as a custard. Having passed her, he went on toward the bar-room doorway, meeting odors of whiskey and beer which had been growing stronger for generations. All the tones of the smoky room were brown. Some assault had splintered one doorframe. Above the battered wainscoting hung an old Berks

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County map and two calendars with rosy pictures of young ladies. About twenty young men in Sunday clothes sat around smoking, and the soft scrape of cards was continuous, also the crack of peanut shells, and a lazy voice telling a story. In the darkest corner a spot of white lay asleep on a bench and snorted; it was old Billy Hinkle in his weekly clean linen. The bar, with a fresh decoration of red, fringed napkins folded in fancy shapes and stuck in tumblers, remained locked for Sunday.

George stood in the doorway, looking very prosperous in his handsome clothes, and exchanged salutations with the whole room. Everyone appeared glad to see him. He recognized two friends playing cards in a corner.

"Hello, Joe," he said, amicably. "How goes it, Ambrose?"

The stocky man, whose shoulders seemed about to split his tight coat, looked up, flushing crimson. All of a sudden he wanted to tell George Stroh how it was going, with a fretful wife and more than enough unattractive little children. Instead he spoke of crop prospects, and they discussed the weather, with which they were intimate. A pause followed. Then Ambrose slapped his hand, with the cards in it, on the table.

"Can't a man get sick of the sound of a voice?" he exclaimed, as if he were really sick with disgust and despondency.

George waited gravely, as did the third young fellow. He had a mother to support who was a shrew. When

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it became apparent that Ambrose would not relieve his mind farther, a suggestion was made by a mere turn of George's eye. There were possibilities, for those who knew of them, at the Seven Stars on a Sunday. Presently Ambrose strolled out; and Joe would have followed, but George detained him, and persisted in reading a handbill announcing the raffle of a steer, which had been an event of the preceding summer. While they were standing side by side he murmured, "Is it any better? "

"Well, you see I'm here." Joe smiled in a down-cast fashion, pleased to be asked. "Mother chased me out of the house this morning. I went back though. She is old," he added, protectively.

George swore to himself. "I'm lucky."

He followed Joe as if casually. Ambrose had already made port. In a small room with one narrow window high in the wall, bottles were arranged, barrels, every kind of container; and a cigar-box with money in it was conspicuous on a very little shelf. There among the kegs some time passed pleasantly for the visitors. It was an unusually loud laugh which interrupted them. George did the proper thing by the cigar-box, and they hurried back.

A pink and white, perfumed youth, springlike as a tulip, stood alone in the middle of the bar-room, smiling uncertainly. All diversions had ceased; not even a peanut cracked; everybody was observing.

"Those are gay clothes," said an anxious voice.

"Notice the figure. He couldn't take a full breath."

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“ Sissy! ”

“ Valentine, come, you mustn’t wear your hat on the back of your neck, no matter how it hurts that curly bang.”

“ You are all jealous. That’s what it is, — jealous,” the boy retorted, lighting a cigarette.

“ Gentlemen, we must sympathize with those who suffer. Our young fellow-citizen got the mitten from Ellie in spite of all this.”

“ Valentine! After all your trouble! ”

“ You won’t be long without a girl, a dressy fellow like you.”

“ We’ll all help you pick one. Graul’s Edna! She has one good eye.”

The boy blushed. His smile was fixed, but he began to swallow hard.

“ I never thought Ellie quite your style, Val,” George said loudly, also lighting a cigarette.

The victim turned on the crowd. “ Ah! You fellows don’t know what style is. Bet I get a handsomer girl than any of you.”

He asserted himself until everyone was tired of him; then he went sidling over to George. “ Aren’t these socks nice? ” he whispered.

“ Purple is a very pretty color.”

“ I think this white rose perfume has a rich smell.”

“ You are quite right.”

George sauntered out, and came back with the expression of a faun seeking a plaything. Old Billy Hinkle, his face crumpled against one elbow, still lay

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sound asleep on his bench. For poor Billy, always thirsty, without any privileges at the Seven Stars, Sunday was a hard day. Noiselessly, his eyelids half closed, George took possession of a fishing-rod which had been forgotten in a corner. One man after another noticed his manœuvres; in silence, cards ceasing to shuffle, the company watched the fishing. At the first prick Billy only twitched and muttered; the second puncture made him flap both hands, and he looked very indignant without opening his eyes. Working with concentration, George succeeded in starting blood in one clammy cheek. Then Billy, a hanger-on for many years, shot up.

“Where is that hornet?”

All the faces in the ring around him jeered, the dangling hook insulted him. “You — you —,” he screamed, unable to think of the right words, as he leaped at his tormentor. The crowd gave voice to their happy surprise; and in less than one minute the landlord made a fine, impressive, dramatic entrance. Without comment he grasped Billy by his shirt, removed him to the porch, placed him in a chair, and let himself down in his own chair with a cynical sigh. Billy immediately started back.

“Here, here! Not into my bar-room! I will have no fighting on my premises.”

“George Stroh insulted me. I want satisfaction. He made me a fool before the whole crowd.”

“By scratching you a little? Wipe your cheek. Satisfaction! Didn’t he hold you with one hand? Let

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the young rooster crow. I give him a couple of years."

"What?"

"He has it in him to be as great a butt as that boy with the clothes, and in other ways to equal you," Nicholas explained, suavely.

Both looked up at George himself, very fresh and rosy, surveying them from the doorway.

"Did I hurt you, Billy?" he asked. "Well this will pay the damage. Spend it tomorrow."

This time it was a silver dollar that he threw down; they heard him, as he went in, laughing at the outsider. The coin rolled into the road. Billy hesitated, then he scrambled down and picked it out of the dust.

"I thought George Stroh had insulted you," Nicholas said, and he too went in.

Lively conversation was going on, jokes and a give-and-take that was meant to be shocking; the others strove to keep up with George. He was now perfectly approachable, leaning against the bar and laughing: what he found to say was more and more unconventional. The watchful Joe looked worried, and presently raised his voice.

"What grand music you gave us this morning!"

"Think so?" George answered, flattered at once.

"It was fine," the beautified boy put in, with a privileged air.

"I don't get time to go to church, but my daughter told me how your singing was admired," Nicholas said.

"Come, we'd like to hear the same."

"That's not the only song I know."

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"Better give us your hymn. That's the one we want." To himself Nicholas added, "If he is not too drunk to remember that he sang his precious hymn here he will feel as if he had been rolled in the mud."

"No. I made this one too. You'll like it."

George struck a graceful attitude. His coloring was very bright; among the brown shadows he appeared resplendent; and his merry face made the audience smile as he dashed into his song.

When the round white moon walks over the hill
There's another white face comes peering up;
And he sniffs fresh air, and he stares his fill,
And he rises from the grave like steam from a cup.
Oh, Grandfather Yost is a jolly old ghost,
And in death he is far less dead than most.

He is tired of his idleness down in the ground;
He wants to get back where he used to be so busy;
So he glides down the road, looking, all around,
Greeting Annie in the moonlight, and Katie and
Lizzie.

Oh, Grandfather Yost is a jolly old ghost,
And in death he is far less dead than most.

He knows what's what in lashes and in curls,
But he's always disappointed, for he can't get near
them

How can he court these pretty, pretty girls?

When they see him they shriek so the town can
hear them.

Oh, Grandfather Yost is a jolly old ghost,
And in death he is far less dead than most.

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Although here, as at the church, three quarters of the audience could not understand the English words, the young men felt the simple, rapid, joyous music in their blood; they smiled, and beat time.

“Sing! Sing the chorus!” George called. And some of them tried whistling the air. When he suddenly let out his ringing baritone on a high note, then non-legato on a low one, the whole crowd joined with a wordless shout that carried far across the fields. Valentine sang lustily, Joe added his mild tenor, Ambrose began to look cheerful as he followed the rest, and the landlord boomed in the bass; even Billy the exile sang outside a window. They were all hot and hilarious together. Above the chorus of common voices the one fine voice went on, surmounting their volume as the seabird moves floating with the wave. Flossy in the parlor shed tears of pride.

“Sing another, George!”

“All right. This is a good one.”

After a minute's pause and a little humming he began again, changing to a velvety vocal quality and a restless tune.

The Lord made Eve from Adam's side,
And that's the place for her.
He made a girl for every man,
And who can help him as she can?
But God has a mind to joke sometimes.
Then Adam gives his blood and hide
Without even 'Thank you, sir!'

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To be alone is worst of all,
And I shall soon be old.
On a single pillow I lay my head,
And I dream of sons in a lonesome bed.
God put my girl where I can't find her!
Oh, how my summer wears to fall
And leaves me in the cold!

This time nobody tried to sing, the applause sounded chastened, they felt melancholy; more than one heart in the crowd began to yearn, and this yearning was as genuine as the most respectable of its emotions, only without any particular object. "See what I can do with them!" thought the proud soloist, as he disappeared with hardly any precautions. He drew suspicious looks a little later, being red and unsteady; and the landlord came over to him, and said, quietly, "It's time for you to go."

"I'll go with him," Joe whispered.

George followed unwillingly into the hall; then he made a dash, and Joe caught up with him in the little room among the kegs.

"This is not a good place for you. Come now."

"Where?"

"You know where."

"I won't. I am all right."

"Oh, yes, come with me a while. You are tired and sleepy."

Immediately George felt very tired and sleepy.

"Come on. I want to tell you something. Oh, for Heaven's sake don't sing now!"

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Miss Siess, who had been waiting for this, rushed out of the parlor to assist; and all the way upstairs George kept repeating what a nice girl Flossy was. Once there, he became interested in a gay thing on the bed. It was Flossy's new hat, and it belonged in the closet in a box, but she had been in a hurry. He seemed to admire it, and she gazed at him and was pleased. When he opened his pocket-knife and began without any haste to cut off all the large pink roses as if it were a bush she made a sound that was almost a yelp; then she stood petrified because it was he who was doing it. She even took a rose when he gave her one, scattering the rest over the floor.

"Oh, my hat!" she thought, as she walked downstairs. "But indeed he is such a man that everything he does becomes him."

In ten minutes George was smiling in his sleep. Joe locked the door, pocketed the key, and sat down; there he remained, faithfully. His own lot was not interesting to him; he got what he could from the fortunes of others. As the afternoon went by, the changes in the light were not dissimilar to the changes in his pleasant, unexpectant eyes.

There was much muttering and tossing in the bed before a voice remarked, "Oh, this is where I am."

"And now it is time for you to be elsewhere. Come, I'll help you. Don't make such a noise."

"What do you think I am, a baby? I'm cold."

"George, you absolutely must keep quiet and go peaceably."

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“ Let’s have a drink! ”

“ One but no more.”

George took with him all of Flossy’s roses. Joe succeeded in getting him downstairs cautiously, but he then headed for the little room and would not hear of leaving it until he was again in a state of felicity.

“ Have you anything to drink about you, I wonder? ” Joe said, feeling his charge’s pockets. “ So? That’s a big flask. What were you going to do with a revolver? Oh, I see I must take you home. Come on. Your team is around at the side gate. George, you must not sing! ”

“ I need no child’s-nurse,” George declared with great dignity.

He got into the buggy first, with his roses; and as Joe was about to step in after him he cut the horse with the whip.

“ Aha! Aha! ” he shouted, looking back at his chaperon standing anxiously in the road. “ Got ahead of you that time! Now I *am* off! ”

CHAPTER III

I WON'T go home. I'll turn down every crossroad I see."

Guided by this principle alone, the representative of the Yosts drove on and on, happy as a lark. He admired the landscape, gaily saluted all who passed, and sang. A poem which he tried to make about the moon did not go very well because he could not remember the words long enough to find rhymes for them; so he aimed carefully at the baffling white face and shot at it as fast as he could pull the trigger.

When the terrified horse had slowed down of himself it occurred to the young man, but not as a cause for anxiety, that he did not know where he was.

"What a lonely place! "

The hills, each with intense darkness¹ at its foot, crowded the crooked road; on the far side of the ruts and by every rock lay patches of inky black; streaming moonlight made the shadowy bushes and the wild vines draping the fences appear tropically rich. Over the gray fields hung clouds of mist from an invisible stream, and the water had a delicate sound. The air was full of odors of fresh plants and soil warmed by the sun, the smell of the land at night. So amenable by day, the earth had turned reticent, leading a

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life of its own. A whitish glow covered the sky: masses of cloud, drifting and meeting, formed between their thick, illumined edges a silver cave; and in its depths, against a turquoise background, floated the moon.

“Where in the world am I? This is not the Northkill.”

It was a furtive stream which spread out into a marsh roaring with frogs. They were all struck dumb by the clatter when George crossed the bridge, and he prompted them:

“More rum! More rum!”

Beyond a sharp turn to the left the road began to ascend a ravine so narrow that there was little more than room for the rivulet between the converging hills. The steep ridge on the west was covered with woods; among the foliage of oak and chestnut, which received a soft silver bloom from the moonlight, appeared many black evergreens. On the broadbacked eastern hill a number of fields had been cleared; and there stood one poor little house surrounded by old apple-trees, a wild and solitary habitation. As the wanderer came near a door closed; it was an arresting sound.

The horse stopped, his sides heaving, while George studied the place. It was not quite all asleep; an immense tiger-cat sprang to the top of the fence as if it had been disturbed. He watched to see what had fled from him; it seemed a long time before a figure became visible at one of the dark, curtainless windows. The fugitive had turned and fixed eyes upon him; he

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had to give chase. He did not waste a moment; bracing one hand on the windowsill, he went in feet first, through sash and panes, with a wild, wonderful smash.

“ Well, how have you been? ” he inquired.

Although her breathing showed that she was alarmed, the young woman made no demonstrations. She looked at him carefully. By the moonlight she could see what he looked like, and that he was bleeding from two or three cuts. Then she began to laugh.

“ Now things are going nicely,” he remarked.

He waited for her to speak, but she did not; and she stopped laughing.

“ I drove miles, many miles, on purpose to make your acquaintance. Won't you please say something to me? ”

Still she said nothing.

“ I hope I didn't frighten you. I shall wait a moment. I shall wait here.”

He left it all to her. As she did not move, he remained in his attitude of profound homage until he became quite hopeless.

“ Don't disturb yourself, Miss — Miss — ? ”

The name was not supplied.

“ Goodnight,” he said, forgivingly.

Steps sounded on the stairs, the door opened, and a man came in, unmistakably the owner of the place. After looking at George and at the shattered window he spoke.

“ Get out! ”

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“I only spoke to the young lady.”

“Is that all? ”

“I was driving along, and I saw her through that window. George Stroh is my name. I have my team outside,” he added, as if that were a great point in his favor.

“Well, now go home.” The speaker went close to George, and observed him. “You come with me.”

No help, not a word, was offered by the charmer listening in the corner. George tried his best to linger, but could not even avoid going out first. Although he found himself sitting idle behind his own horse, the reins in the other's man's hands, it all seemed right, and after offering his flask politely and using it satisfactorily he slept on the way back to Yost's. Safely there, he carried upstairs Flossy's roses, every one of which he had insisted on collecting from the floor of the carriage. It did occur to him, when he heard the stranger walk away along the road, that a bed might have been offered to a man so far from home at that time of night; but it was not a disturbing thought. He emptied the flask, and lay down and slept for hours and hours his healthy, innocent sleep. In the morning, when he saw them all over the floor, he could not imagine where he got all those cotton roses.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN George was disposed of, Daniel Hain walked over to Middleport. On the way he apologized to himself several times for his foolishness. Stroh might have got badly hurt if he had driven home alone, being so drunk, the young loafer. Daniel knew where to go; one of the three or four friends he had was Louisa Fry, who owned the Crossed Keys. After a few hours' sleep there he set out for home about the time the birds began to chirp; and he took all possible short cuts and urged his borrowed horse. There was much to be done that day at Mount Misery.

Daniel appeared well on horseback; he was a powerfully built man whose presence was as reassuring as a shepherd dog's. He watched the mountains becoming visible through the morning twilight as if they were companions returning to him. Before he had gone half way, the east blushed and light began to stream from the whole sky; for a few moments rose-colored clouds with burnished edges floated before a background of pearl, pure and cold. Then his dark eyes became almost ecstatic. Over the last hill, Mount Misery, so called because it was such a hopeless place to farm, the horse had to pick his way along a stony footpath. Few trees grew there; chewinks were leaping among the old

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fallen leaves, and patches of sweetfern and berrybushes covered with frail blossoms sheltered the catbird and the rabbit. From the top of the hill Daniel surveyed his acres and all that belonged to him, and saw very little romance in it: there was not much by daylight. This was not peaceful country hereabouts, it was all gaunt and rough with dead timber and rocks. Every stone in the fences had been picked from the ground, and out of the thin soil on the slopes the seed was often washed by the rains. A row of red spots which were blossoming geraniums appeared extremely bright against his weather-beaten gray house. Beyond it were the road and the stream, then the ridge with the dark woods; the pointed tops of young cedars along the summit looked like wolves' ears cocked.

As he rode down, the girl who had been at the window the night before sprang apprehensively from the grass in a corner of the dooryard. Her little face was wet with May dew; at the moment there was a fire-flash visible in the broad space between her liquid eyes; the sweep of her eyebrows suggested a bird's outspread wings. An air she had, the transitory air of a gentle wild creature, was alluring: it would have suited her to dance like a Mænad over the open hills, with her chestnut locks streaming.

Daniel felt as he did when she was a little thing in a faded red cotton dress and not much else, coming to him trustfully to button her up. He could not scold her, she was so sweet. The window was broken. Well, let it be.

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All he said was, "Eva, where's Sylvester?"

"At the barn."

"Tell him to look after this horse."

She led the horse away herself. Her father observed that while Sylvester did double duty with the stock and Helen bent over the stove Eva was out in the sunshine, washing her freckles in May dew; but when she did get at the work it would fly. He himself went to put on working clothes. The yard remained to the tiger-cat, on the fence with his big, ringed tail curled around his thick legs, his savage eyes cynically contemplating space, — a kind of garden genie.

In the kitchen, an inconvenient place full of make-shifts, with hardly a good feature except plenty of light, the four members of the Hain family gathered and sat down. Breakfast was put on the table by Helen, a neat young person, very pretty in a grave way. Sylvester, the eldest, maintained one of his authoritative silences. The work waited. As soon as he had eaten he hastened out to get at it, but when he passed the shattered window, such a complete wreck stopped him short. He questioned his father with a look, and was cautioned with another. Not until they were moving along in the potato-field, hoeing up the weeds, did Sylvester speak.

"Well?"

"The window was broken last night," answered Daniel, who would have been glad to conceal the whole thing.

"How?"

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"I was surprised that the crash didn't wake you. A man jumped through it."

At this exciting reply Sylvester went so far as to slow down his hoeing.

"Who? "

"George Stroh."

"Why? "

"He saw Eva."

To the brief account which followed the elder brother listened with great interest. Then, not being requested to give an opinion, he saved his words; he never wasted anything.

"Well? " Daniel said.

"I wish it had been Helen, though Eva is a beauty too, and two years younger."

"What do you know against Stroh? "

"Not so much. I never saw him in my life. Of course I have heard some talk."

"We need not make up our minds that anything will happen, of whatever sort."

"Eva is a splendid worker. I don't see how we could keep the place going without her," said Sylvester, taking a great deal for granted all of a sudden.

"We must deal with it as it comes. To be careful of her is the main thing."

They went on with their work, advancing slowly along the row. Daniel felt as if there had been a foreclosure unexpectedly.

He was here at Mount Misery because the momentous decisions of his youth had been made to suit the

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convenience of other people. His father never believed that Dan lost anything by staying on the land; his two brothers-in-law thought that Dan had rather a good thing all that time when he was only paying his sisters' interest on their shares of the estate while he held on to the whole place. At twenty he had married. No matter how anxiously he questioned himself whether he might do better in any way for his children, he could never wish that they had their mother back. The cares of the present, the years when the barest necessities were so hard to get that they almost became ideals, — all seemed bearable in comparison with that long-drawn-out defeat. A double row of white silk pompons which his wife would have liked had been added at the last moment to her shroud, because he was ashamed of having given a thought to the cost of it. Afterwards he and the children took hold of the crippled establishment themselves. Now they were in the position of survivors of a shipwreck, having their hands and the ground they stood on, not much else except his air-castle. It was wonderful that he had any visions left; those he had were not fervently gorgeous but fervently definite. Whenever he looked at his place he saw mentally what he would do to improve it as fast as he made the money — the modern machines, the new buildings, the fine horses and cattle. The old name of Mount Misery should not be changed, it should be a joke. A dignified home for his children, a place which would cause them to be well regarded — he would work for that until he

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dropped. What would be to the advantage of other people inspired him yet.

Having a good deal of this in mind, he reflected, deliberately, "It might not have been a bad thing, provided I could satisfy myself on some points — if after a few years, when perhaps my girls can begin to appear as I want to see them — if then George Stroh had come, sober, by daylight, to my front door. I hope I'll have a new front door by that time. But it didn't happen in that way."

He grinned a little to himself, and was about to say something optimistic about utilizing their waterpower, when Sylvester, who had been faithfully hoeing, spoke.

"Father, you know I would always take the best care I could of the girls."

"What? I don't expect it to come to that," Daniel answered, sharply. "Has Sylvester no confidence in me?" he thought; but in a moment he went on, in a warmer tone than usual, "You will soon be of age; and you know what a man's wishes are. I would not restrain any of you if you found the right companion."

"I am not thinking of anything of that kind. I have not time," Sylvester said, repelled by this allusion to his secret hopes. He went on, to himself, "Father believes he could do without me easily. Where would he find another man to work as hard as I do, cultivating this damned stone-pile? If I started for myself it wouldn't take me long to get my little place in Florida, and potato-fields worth having. Then no more cold winters."

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He worked faster. His hands, black with stains that would not come off, were distorted; one finger had been crushed by a harrow. Sometimes when a breeze came he stood up to rest, straightening his heavy shoulders, and gazing at the hills.

On the wild ground above the field some azalea-bushes made great splashes of hot rosecolor; a meadow-lark kept singing lonely little songs; far up in the sky a buzzard sailed and sailed.

“Where is there a more beautiful spot?” Daniel thought. “But there will be no cash coming in until I sell the hay. What a job it is to run a farm, even a two-horse farm like this. It seems that part of each crop must be a loss; the rain falls on the cut hay, and then there is none for the corn. God! Don’t make my children work as hard as I do. Don’t let my son be a man like me; give my daughters a little easier time. Enable me to do for them what I want to do: it’s not so much. And for Christ’s sake don’t leave me sitting around their houses when I am old.”

There seemed to be hundreds of hours in this day. As the men labored on and on they saw how the weeds and the pests were going on too, with great energy and vitality. Afternoon was like morning except that the sunshine came from a different angle and the dew was dry; they were marooned by their work. When at last the time to leave off had come and they tramped home with their hoes over their shoulders, they did not find repose. The calf was lost. It was a little calf, and now seemed their most valuable possession. At

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once Daniel, Sylvester and Eva began to walk over the farm and adjacent territory and over it again. The outcries of the cow, while they hurried through their supper made them all nervous; and they kept on walking until every corner had been searched, and there remained no reason to look in one place rather than in another.

“Let the cow find it,” said Eva, inspired. “Let the poor thing out. She will know where to go.”

With lighted lanterns the whole family streamed out of the house and followed the frantic cow. She made for the top of the hill, breaking through the brush and calling. When they came up with her among the laurel-bushes she was licking the calf, and it was fast asleep after having made so much trouble.

As they all went slowly winding down again through the pasture, with the lanterns flickering around the animals, Helen drew Eva away from the men to tell a piece of news which she had heard from a passer-by in the afternoon.

Eva joyfully whispered back, “I’ll ask Father.”

“He will say no.”

“Why? We work hard, and during haytime and harvest-time we shall work much harder.”

“Father never lets us do anything,” was Helen’s calm reply.

“Do you want to spend all your days in this muddy hole? ”

“I don’t want to spend one more day in it. I want to live where there are pavements, and go to school.

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But what difference does that make? We are here. Ask Father if you think it is worth while. I forgot all about it until now, we have been so busy."

There was still work to do, the stock to be fed and watered. Another hour passed in dirt and dust; then the day really reached an end, and Daniel walked out on the porch and lighted his pipe. Between him and the dark ridge opposite the air sparkled with fireflies. Night with its quiet was coming, as it had come to those who worked with the soil throughout all generations; he listened to its unchanging sounds — whispers and sighs, as if the earth which could not make itself heard by day now found many unobtrusive voices. He smoked and thought, content when he thought of his wife. That was over.

So quietly that she seemed to drift through the dusk, Eva placed herself on the porch at his feet, folded her active hands, and waited a while for what he might have to say. Her face was visible to him as a small white blur.

He regarded her with pride and anxiety, and said to himself, "I'll not speak of George Stroh at all. It is peaceful now."

"Father," she asked, in her gentlest voice, "May I go to Middleport next Saturday?"

"Middleport! Near where Stroh lives!" Daniel thought, instantly, and he did not answer for a while. Something was bound to happen; this was the beginning; what it was and how bad he would soon find out now. "Why do you want to go there?" he inquired.

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"It's Battalion Day. It will be such a celebration as they have never had, a parade with floats, and decorations on the houses, and bands, and a big dance at the Crossed Keys. Helen heard about it. She doesn't care for it; she offered to do the work."

"No," Daniel said, promptly. "I couldn't have you in that crowd, standing in the street among a lot of fellows who are more than half drunk. I am responsible for you," he added, with tenderness.

"It can't be such a bad crowd, Father. Nice people go." Waiting for him to say something, she felt more and more alienated. With difficult gentleness she suggested, "If you don't want me to stay for the dance may I go long enough to see the parade? Please let me," she entreated, like a child.

He pitied her. To let her spend the day at the Crossed Keys occurred to him; but the Crossed Keys would be headquarters for all that went on, Stroh would most certainly be there, and Eva had never seen Louisa Fry.

"We have no friends you could visit in Middleport," he said, half to himself.

Although she had been thinking the same thing, to have it stated so plainly brought a lump into her throat.

"No. We have no friends," she agreed, gentle as an echo; but she was thinking, with fury, "Of course not! We are not fit to be seen. Everybody knows how poor we are. It is a disgrace to be so poor. I am ashamed of him because he can't provide for us as other fathers do."

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With the cadence of her last words in his ear he thought of taking her to Middleport himself, and of telling Sylvester to take her.

“No,” he decided. “Stroh was very drunk. There is hope that he has forgotten the whole thing. He shall not see her in that Battalion Day crowd.”

Even while Daniel acted on it he avoided facing what was in his mind. “George Stroh — while I am in my present circumstances — would not seek my daughter to marry her.” That, with all it implied in regard to Eva, he could not bear to think of.

He wanted to deal with her as delicately as he could, to spare her all he could. Although he hated to admit that he was pressed for money, and feared to mention any hopes whatever because so many of them had gone to nothing, he determined to do both. This was a way to try to win her, the best way he could find.

“It will not always be like this,” he began, cautiously. “The thing for us is to do as we are doing for a while. I have had hard pulling, Eva, and I am just now getting out of the woods. I have certain plans —.” His manner remained very moderate; but it was his golden dream, it no longer seemed so far off, and he became enthusiastic thinking of it. “Be a little patient. I ask only for a couple of good years to give me a start. I want you to hold your head high. It will be much better if we keep to ourselves now, though it is lonely.”

To request a few hours holiday this week, and be told to wait, under strict regulations, for a few years

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of good crops! She knew what might be expected of crops. These were great plans of his.

She said, "It would not cost anything on Saturday."

"Say no more about it."

Without another word she walked away, around the house, and threw herself upon the cellar-door, still a little warm from the sun. Oh, who would be the lucky girl to drive with George Stroh on Battalion Day?

Everything would have seemed different to her if she could have looked forward only to a little while where it was gay; but she expected nothing except the same routine, hard and stupid. She felt as if she were in a trap, and half perceived that she really was so, because she had been born at Mount Misery, because she had to have food and clothing, because she did not know where to go. Suddenly she realized with intensity the years and years and decades that were ahead; and it seemed to her that through all of them she would still keep on drudging and hungering and imprisoned. Burying her face in her arms, forcing herself to be noiseless, she pressed her body against the comforting door.

CHAPTER V

ALL the neighborhood of Middleport wanted to know what girl would drive with George Stroh on Battalion Day. Ever since he came of age his marriage had been a subject for speculation, and it was supposed that his choice on this day would be significant. Although Mary knew perfectly that her friends were saying, "Don't you think it will be Mary Shell?" she was too happy to care.

When she was a little girl he was the heroic older boy whom she secretly admired. As to the gossip about him now, she heard it frequently, disbelieved two thirds, and thought the rest unimportant. She had never expected anything else than that some time he would marry someone magnificent, until the last few minutes in the churchyard changed everything for her. It was very wonderful that he should want her; but she had no mistrust of him at all. The days since Sunday and the moonlight nights passed in restless bliss, and everything she did was done for him.

"It was like him not to come on Sunday afternoon," she thought. "Caring for me, he would not want to speak of it on impulse, as he did out there in the graveyard; he will do it in a dignified way. He will wait until Battalion Day. Then when all the people are

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very gay it will delight him to know that we are happier than any of them. He said, 'I couldn't get on without you,' and he kissed me. He would not have done that to me if he had not meant it."

On the awaited morning there was bright sunshine that promised to stay all day. Mary hurried through the necessary work. When she was dressed in white and green, she went to the door and stood looking out.

Not a cloud cast a shadow on the Blue Mountain. Middleport lay so close to the great ridge that the gardens on the north side of the street met the first bushy, wild growth, and were invaded perpetually by rabbits. The one and only street changed into a country road beyond the schoolhouse, the last house at the east end. Mary, living next door, heard the buzz of recitations for hours daily. Opposite her gate the road to Reading turned off southward, and at that corner stood the Crossed Keys, a large, low stone building with an uneven stone pavement widened into a sort of court. A flag waved above the schoolhouse. The Crossed Keys was bright with flags. In the parlor windows were bouquets composed of red roses, white snowballs and blue cornflowers.

Looking westward between the horse-chestnuts and cherrytrees, Mary saw red, white and blue on all sides. Although the houses were set irregularly, and were miscellaneous in style — stone farmhouse, plaster cottage, wooden "mansion" embellished with jigsaw work and the brightest paints — today, when not a house

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lacked its decoration, the half mile or more of decorations appeared harmoniously gay. Both stores were draped with patriotic bunting. Across the doorway of the blacksmith's shop, against the dark interior, all soot, rust and iron, a row of Chinese lanterns hung. The laziest man in town had stuck a flag above his paintless door.

The day was beginning. Few mothers could be seen, as they remained indoors, getting ready for company, but carefree fathers sat on clean porches, and it seemed that all the children of the community were out in clean clothes. An organ-grinder with a monkey made music in front of the larger store. Under the trees stood lemonade-stands displaying cakes with red, white and blue sugar on them. The balloon-man had glossy red, blue and green balloons floating over his shoulder. A baking-powder agent was distributing purple fans. One after another the big spring wagons, freshly washed and with beribboned whips, came up to the Crossed Keys, bringing whole families. A hay-wagon from a village ten miles away arrived with a crowd of young men wearing the fanciest ties and stockings, who began immediately to pitch quoits in the street. Boys on heavy plough-horses kept dashing up to the hotel, and then away again to the other end of town, delighted with the one yearly opportunity to ride as fast and as stylishly as they could. Already several politicians were in circulation, button-holing and promising.

Three or four girls came to spend the morning and

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see the sights from Mary's dooryard, which was as convenient as a private box. They were the nicest girls in the neighborhood. Every one of them wished to have it settled who would drive with George Stroh. Nobody knew that even yet; so they talked, laughing and nervously changing the subject a little oftener than usual. One of them pinned some golden alyssum among Mary's shining braids.

The hour for the parade came and also went. As far as the girls could see along the shady road to Reading it was full of decorated carriages, white dresses, fidgety horses, musicians, eminent citizens, militia-men, and boys of all sizes, in wild confusion and moving without purpose every minute. Several times, as they all waited and waited and the sun grew hotter, an outcry and a sudden swirl in the crowd indicated a fight. The visiting militia were irate; they shouted whatever they had to say to each other, even if they were only two feet apart, and used the worst language.

"Why doesn't she start?"

"What are we waiting for?"

"Why do you wait for George Stroh? Not the captain of your company, is he?"

"He gave us our uniforms, I tell you, and muskets and everything. No more broomsticks for us when we drill!"

"Here he comes."

Lips that were his for the taking laughed as the whole crowd looked in the same direction, and so broad a way was made for him that he could dash

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down the street. The bays were high steppers, their silver-mounted harness glittered; the dark blue piano-box buggy was a graceful thing. No such combination as that had ever been seen in horse-loving Middleport. The least gesture from him would have brought any girl in the town to the seat by his side, but there was a woman there. Dressed to do credit to the turnout, Christiana Stroh herself sat beside her son, looking down at the aspirants with a cool, possessive smile. She knew how those girls felt.

Now that they were permitted to start, the marshal, on horseback, sitting on a red, white and blue saddle-cloth, wearing an immense plume on his hat and a baldric across his chest, and trying to look unconscious, pranced around the corner. After him came the local band, blowing and drumming, then the various companies of militia.

Thrills of proud joy ran through the assemblage when the Middleport company appeared; with their beautiful uniforms, arms and brass buckles, all shining and bright, they were by far the finest body of men in line. Thoroughly convinced of this, they marched up the street, eyes upon the girls; and before they had gone any distance nearly all of them had been presented with bouquets, which they held firmly about a foot and a half in front of their stomachs, while the strangers, conscious of being outshone, went along perspiring in dusty boots. At intervals, to make the parade longer, followed carriages full of politicians and important elderly persons, a secret society in regalia

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and another society dressed as Indians. When the visiting band advanced, in red uniforms with broad yellow facings, it was agreed by everybody that they were less stylish than the local band, and did not play as well. The patriotic float moved slowly; upon it, the centre of a group of girls in white, and waving flags, stood a young woman who seemed a little stout for the Goddess of Liberty. She was dressed in a flag, her frizzed hair blew around her shoulders, and she held up a laurel-wreath dramatically.

Mary enjoyed everything, but it was hard to be properly cheerful. George would not come before evening, she said to herself. The parade was over. Her friends left her, and she went indoors gladly. Her home seemed very pleasant, the task of preparing dinner quite important. All the conditions of her life had acquired poetic dignity. As soon as her father joined the crowds streaming out to the drill-ground she closed the house and shut herself in her own room, where the excitement could reach her only in the form of cheerful noises. Now it was hard to be by herself. Her hands were cold, her cheeks burned. She tried to read, but the book seemed a superfluous thing. She tried to sleep, and could not lie still. Finally she took out of her best drawer some white material and some lace, bought in a fit of extravagance and never used because they were too fine. With paper patterns all over the floor she soon grew serene; she drew little designs for embroidery on the backs of old envelopes, and sang to herself.

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Late in the afternoon sounds of confusion outside attracted her attention, and about the same time it became too dark to sew. A sky that looked as if the sun were buried forever shut down like a lid upon the Blue Mountain, which was as gray as stone, and a cold wind tore at the frail decorations. It seemed that months had passed since morning, that autumn had come. Dismayed people trooped back from the drill-ground; teams rattled off to shelter; Indians flew home, holding on their war-bonnets, and with her patriotic garments close-reefed the Goddess of Liberty went scudding by. Then one great blast of wind drove down the street, and the rain pelted. Above the mountain, now visible only as a thick shadow, the yellow lightning forked and flared; the downpour roared among the hills like breakers, and the trees cracked.

“I must get out!” Mary exclaimed.

She wrapped herself in a thick shawl from head to foot, left the stuffy, silent house and drenched garden, and followed a path that led along the mountain-side. Up among the trees the air was cold, sweet and heavy; raindrops knocked upon the leaves, the branches tossed, and the swollen Northkill made itself heard among the other stormy sounds. Looking down across dripping green thickets, she saw the lights come out along the street; then she left all that. The dark woods stretched for miles above and beyond her. The storm raged on. She was alone with the mountain.

A strange feeling she had, as if her heart were con-

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finely and pressed hard against what imprisoned it, increased much in this wild spot; she felt a fiery happiness.

“It seems as if there were no other man. A spirit to love him as he needs, a mind to understand him, charm to hold him — . Oh, I’ll try! It will not be long now.”

A circle of lights flashed out around a gospel tent which had been set up in the field opposite the school-house. She knew what time it was from this, and she hastened down. The rain had stopped, leaving the whole town soaked and disappointed. All over the street, deep in mud, were scattered shreds from the decorations and remains of purple paper fans; stringy bunting flapped in the damp breeze; of the blacksmith’s Chinese lanterns, which should by now have been burning brightly, some had blown away, and the rest would never shine again. Several young women, shivering in summer dresses, looked with discouragement at each others’ muddy skirts; and more than one child wailed. The fiddles at the Crossed Keys were playing, and kept patiently on, whether anyone danced or not.

When Mary closed her own gate everything dreary or perfunctory was shut out. The scent of moist lad’s-love and southern-wood met her. She opened all the windows to it, could find nothing untidy in her best room, and came out again to gather some wet flowers. That room could not be without flowers. While she changed her dripping clothes she sang a little, fitfully,

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and as she went down-stairs and lighted two lamps her sense of hearing was more acute than usual. What was to be hers was the best that could be, and she felt undeserving; but she would not have gone a step to meet it, and coming to her it would be met with unassuming poise.

“He is on the way,” she thought. “I feel it.”

She saw George drive up to the Crossed Keys, and walk across the street with a basket in his hand. There was a minute, as he stood at the door, when she forced herself not to be panic-stricken. He came in cheerfully.

“Mother sent this. It is a shoo-fly cake for your breakfast. Well, what did you think of the parade?”

“Everybody said it was the best we ever had here. Your horses and your new carriage are beautiful.”

They discussed the parade in detail; he described the drill, which had taken place in the afternoon; they both regretted the rain.

“With Whitsunday and Battalion Day coming so close together this has been a lively week for Middleport,” she said.

“Yes, and I have enjoyed it. Now we must settle down and go to work. There is plenty of work ahead.” He particularized about the harvest.

She looked at him in a dazed way. He was sitting almost in the middle of the room, very comfortable in a big chair.

“Going over to the dance?” he inquired, amiably.

“I don’t think so.”

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“Have you been to any of the gospel meetings?”

“No, not yet.” — “He shall not know what I believed, he shall not,” she said to herself, unsteadily.

He thought, “She seems nervous tonight”; and he tried again. “The preacher’s methods over there are worth watching. This room looks as if you were going to have a party.”

She glanced at the clean curtains, the lamps burning clear, the opening roses.

“Well, I must be off. Oh! Mother wants you and your father to come to supper next Saturday evening.”

Having accepted this invitation and said goodbye to him, she at once went upstairs and commenced to take off her dress. Her delicate sewing of the afternoon was still scattered about. The voice of the preacher could be heard from the gospel tent, also the fiddles at the Crossed Keys; and it began to rain again, noisily. Her hands moved more and more slowly. After those days of expecting much she was back again where she did not expect anything. What was to be met rolled over her like a wave; she met it standing.

“It was all a dream, a bold dream. And I let him touch me! He did not mean it. I only hoped. It was nothing to him.”

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT seven o'clock on the evening of Battalion Day Eva Hain was walking eastward along the road at the foot of the Blue Mountain. She kept on going toward Middleport because she had started to go there. Now she had no reason for wanting to arrive.

It was very wet. When she passed the southward road which led to Yost's she looked eagerly in that direction, but the air was so foggy that she saw nothing but dim trees with masses of leaves. Yost's Church shone with moisture all over the stone-work, and the lights of Middleport looked larger than usual through the fine rain. Dark gray, with clouds like tatters drifting along its top, the Blue Mountain appeared a ghostly barrier; mist and twilight blurred the green woods and the green, rolling fields.

Eva went on, walking in the grass at the side of the road, under her umbrella. She was limp and damp all over. Her best dress was a red, green and white plaid cotton with white lace Vandyke points turned up around the hem; and with all her care she had not been able to keep those points free from mud. Her white shoes, which had belonged to her mother, were badly spotted above her rubbers; and as a protection her

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mother's fringed white shoulder-shawl looked foolish. Used to being charming, she now felt perfectly ridiculous and woe-begone. When people bound for the dance drove by, she hid as well as she could under the big umbrella.

"If I had had any sense at all I should have turned back instead of waiting under sheds when it was pouring rain, and sneaking into that barn when it lightened so. I couldn't possibly go to the dance alone now. Everyone who saw me would laugh at me, dirty as I am, and all by myself. Father will find it out. I can see him knocking at the door, asking whether my head is better. It is exactly what I might have expected."

Slowly she pulled one foot out of the mud which had nearly sucked off her rubber. It was astonishing to think how she had contrived and taken the greatest pains in order to land here, spoil all her best clothes and to get herself into serious trouble.

"I was so sure that there would be plenty of offers to drive me home. I can't walk those seven miles again without something to eat. If I go to the store and buy a little with my ten cents I can come back here, and sit on the side step of this church where no one will see me. Like a tramp eating in the rain! Seven miles! "

When she reached the store it was necessary to exert herself at once to keep the clerks in their place. They admired red bows in chestnut curls, but were entertained by haughty airs in a girl who bought a penny's worth of this and two pennies' worth of that, and

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wanted it all stowed into one paper bag. A lump in her throat had to be ignored until she had sailed out.

“I don’t believe I can eat now; and I know I can’t get back to that church,” she thought. “I must rest. If only I could sit down in any kind of place, and not be seen! If anyone else makes fun of me I am afraid I shall burst out crying.”

She stopped at the corner and looked about, especially at Mary’s little house with the lights burning behind white curtains. Couples in their best clothes went dancing past the windows at the Crossed Keys in time to the fiddles, and she watched them sorrowfully. In the shallow doorway of the school-house she could not hide. The gospel tent was the only other place; and something was going on there, but she ventured to cross over and look in.

A reading-desk on a platform at one side of the tent was draped in black, with a large yellow and black motto, “Holiness to the Lord,” hanging above. A little old organ, decorated with a tight bunch of snow-balls and bleeding-hearts in a pitcher, stood near by. Straw had been spread on the ground, and seats extemporized from boards and boxes; before the platform, stood a very long, narrow wooden box. Not many people had gathered — a few women, three or four poor-looking old men, a couple of farm-hands, and some boys who hung about near the entrance. A plump blonde, evidently used to the lime-light, was playing a hymn and leading the singing with business-like zeal, and the preacher stood on the platform, all

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ready to begin. He was a stocky man with a square head, gray-brown beard and oily skin.

"I wish I could lie down in that straw," Eva thought. "If I were over in that corner I could sit still. I don't believe they would say anything to me. After a while I can think about getting home."

To lean her head against the tent-canvas and rest her feet in the straw was comfort. The old folks merely raised their eyes and thought that they did not know this girl; but the assistant was aware of her in a minute, and the preacher gave her more than one keen look. While the hymn straggled toward its end some young people came over from the dance, and they expected to giggle and chatter, but he ran his eye from one to another so fiercely that they soon quieted down. There was silence. Every moment or two one of the lights flared, and sent a bright beam across a pair of eyes, a bosom or a lap with folded hands lying in it. Through the rips in the tent could be seen the enormous dark.

"Well!" the preacher began, in easy Pennsylvania German. "There are very few here tonight. I am used to much bigger meetings than this. Now I am not going to have any text, neither shall I preach a sermon. I intend to talk about Battalion Day. You will wonder what I know about it. I know all about it. I was born and raised in Schuylkill County, and I have drilled too, and paraded, and danced and courted the girls."

He paused. His voice had been rousing, but when

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he continued it was quite changed.

“ You are tired.”

He walked across the platform with his head hanging and his whole body sagging. Then he stared at the audience reflectively, with shining eye-balls.

“ The day you looked forward to is past. The big day! You got ready for company, you decorated your houses, you trimmed up generally; you worked very hard. Now it is all over. To be sure, drinks are on tap at the Crossed Keys, and the fiddles are going, and any fellow can drop six cents into the fiddlers' cigar-box and dance a quadrille with his girl; but we who are no longer twenty, we are ready to sit down and rest.”

Some of the old faces regarded him plaintively. More people were coming in, and while he waited for them to be settled he walked the platform again. His eyes, glittering in his grayish yellow face, picked out one person and then another with an intimate and domineering look. Eva watched his movements angrily.

“ This morning you felt all ready for a big day. The sun was shining. You started in. You intended to enjoy yourselves, and you had a pretty fair time. Then came the rain. How it spoiled the fun! The girls could not walk up and down the street thirty or forty times, and show their pretty dresses. The boys could not walk up and down after the pretty girls. The drilling was cut short, the decorations were tee-totally ruined, and everybody caught cold.

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“And suppose that were all you got? — You folks know well enough, if you would only think about it, that this night will be the end for many and many a one. Fat and hearty, some of them! Isn't it a pity that this rain maybe spoiled somebody's last good time?

“So it will be; so it will surely be. No matter whether the end comes now or in ten years or in fifty, you will be always ready to be happy, hungry to be happy, as you were this morning. And something will spoil it, like the rain. Always! Because you're on earth.

“Why can't you get to be happy? Perhaps you have to work beyond your strength, so it's headache and backache nearly all the time. Rent-day comes around oftener than any other day, and you have to wear out your body to keep it covered. Work! Work! And at the end of the year what have you?”

The sighs came up to the preacher's ears. Eva — with everything gone wrong, two muddy white shoes, and a love-story that would not begin — fixed her eyes on her own hands.

“Maybe what makes it hard to live is quite different. You need someone to go along the rest of the way you have to travel, and keep right close; but there is no one. — There was a little fellow once, and you were wonderfully proud of him; and he was going to be yours always; but he didn't stay long, and you thought your heart would break. — There is something you haven't got. You know now that you never will

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get it. You never spoke of it to a soul. The neighbors think you have quite an easy time. You wanted it, didn't you? How you did want it! ”

On more than one face appeared the wet track of a tear. The preacher stopped; and while the assistant sang a mellifluous stanza about rest for the weary, sobs were heard.

“ You have an invitation. You are invited to go, after you have finished your time here, to a place. — Well, I'll tell you! You could not picture anything one half so good as that, not if you put together all the good you know. Rest! You will not need to think of the day as it passes, or of the coming day. Rest! And not only that. Rest, and the desire of your hearts. Glory! Glory! There the mother who has lost her child will find it waiting, and the widow will have her man again. The aching heart will be satisfied.”

“ Glory! Hallelujah! ”

“ But — how are we to get there? ” demanded the preacher.

Half crouching, he stared straight into the faces looking up at him. There was a sort of nakedness in them. Dance-music was heard from the tavern fiddles, very loud.

“ Hear those! ” said he, threateningly. “ In the soul of each one of you is something which would keep you from feeling at home in Heaven, something to spoil even that bright glory. With all your heart you wish you had not done that thing; but it is done.

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You are guilty. There is no getting away from it. In your soul it lies, like the worm in the nut."

"O-oh! O-o-oh, Lord! "

"Look at your souls. Look! What is that rotten spot? "

"I'm going. I'd rather be out in the mud than here," Eva said to herself.

While he ostentatiously looked at no one the preacher continued as if he were calling off items:

"Is there anybody who has seen anything of a false bottom in a peck measure? A man may be a pillar of the church, and yet have a big part of his landlord's share sticking to his fingers. The old grandmother knitting stockings for the little ones? What's against her? Maybe a night her husband never knew of years and years ago. And the young woman with many children? Will the spirit of a child be waiting for her at the Judgment seat, to say, 'Mother, why was I not born? ' "

Suddenly the preacher sprang into the air, waved his arms, and shouted, "And do you think you can sneak into Heaven anyhow? When your last hour comes, and your sins hang on you like weights, and the cold, black flood of death washes you away, and the bright golden gates bang in your faces forever — then you will repent, I tell you, then you will weep and mourn! Stop thinking about rent-day, and how to pay for your next suit of clothes, and think about the day that is drawing nearer and nearer, when no roof will shelter you, and no garments cover your sins. Come forward!

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Kneel down here at the mourners' bench! It is only an old store-box, but it is also the gate of Heaven. Confess your sins! Not to me, a wretched sinner like yourselves, but to your own hearts. Come forward! Come forward! "

" O-o-oh, Lord, have mercy! "

" I lied to Father, and deceived him as much as I could," Eva thought. " And he works hard. Oh, poor Father! "

Now in violent motion, leaping, stamping, clapping his hands, the preacher repeated again and again, " Come forward! Come forward! " The assistant began to sing and play hard, battering the key-board. With the incessant beat, beat of the hymn and the scraping of the fiddles mingled sounds of contrition, weeping and groaning. The preacher screwed his eyes shut and started to pray very loud and imperatively. Suddenly the lights flared high, and the tent flapped and creaked in a gust of wind that ran howling away over the Blue Mountain, while the rain poured down.

Through the straw groping feet rustled. A woman in tears crept to the mourners' bench; she was followed by a fat girl with a streaming red face; then a man shambled up, bent his body like a stiff tool, buried his head in his arms and sobbed.

" Glory! Glory! " the preacher shouted; and he prayed on.

" Praise the Lord! " cried out the assistant, with a blow on the key-board.

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“Oh, I am so wicked! How can they do that with everybody looking at them? Oh, how wicked I am!” Eva went over and over it.

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” came from all sides. A very lean woman stood up straight and stiff, with closed eyes, and began to clap her hands and say at every clap, “Ha-a-allelujah! Ha-a-allelujah!”

“Come forward,” the preacher quietly commanded Eva.

She got up, walked through the audience, and sank into the straw. There she knelt, erect and perfectly still, and lifted her hands to him in appeal, the red-lined palms upward. He came down from the platform and knelt beside her.

“I’m so wicked,” she told him several times. She would have said it to anybody.

“When you feel that, there is good hope. Don’t struggle, don’t hold on to your sins. Let them go. Say, ‘I repent, I renounce,’ and then all the peace and joy that are waiting for you will flow into your soul.”

“It’s no use, not any,” she answered, twisting her body about, although her white face was rigid. “I have a bad heart.”

“No, you have not.”

“I lied to my father today.”

She had begun to shiver and seemed ready to collapse, so he leaned over, still kneeling, and supported her. He looked bored. Other people were forgetting their feelings while they craned their necks; the fat girl had become observant; the nervous man no longer

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sobbed. Just then two voices, the assistant's and another, a spirited baritone, started a familiar hymn. A soothed expression came into the harassed and sorrowful faces; and presently the whole crowd was singing.

During the last verse someone said, "Can I help you, Preacher?"

"Maybe you can. Listen," the preacher said to Eva. "I want you to stop this. I shall stay here another week, and if you like you can talk things over with me; but now you must go. This is no place for you. Will you be a good girl and go straight home?" he asked, kindly.

"I'll try to get home," she answered, beginning quietly to weep.

"I'll take her, Preacher. I have a horse and buggy over at the Crossed Keys."

Eva looked up. It took a full minute for her to realize that she was looking at George Stroh, and that he was waiting for her respectfully.

"She is the only one here who is sincere in what she feels. She has a lovely expression," was his thought.

Down in the straw, weeping on because she could not immediately stop, Eva rectified her attitude.

"Ah! That repentance was not exhaustive. So it goes!" thought the preacher. He said, "Is this young man a friend of yours? Shall he take you home?"

"Yes. I know him," she diffidently replied.

"Smooth little one!" George said to himself. "And

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such a prompt lie: on her knees, with the tears on her lashes! I believe this will be a pleasant evening."

As he conducted her through the audience there were critical smiles, while the blonde assistant stared after them wistfully. A boy had picked up Eva's paper bag of mixed food, and he followed them and tried to give it back. But Eva viewed it with horror, and told him, haughtily, "That's not mine."

CHAPTER VII

WHEN the two left the tent, the night closed around them, softly black, shot with lights from the Crossed Keys. The rain had almost stopped. George spoke with a complimentary inflection which implied that in her he admired all sorts of charms.

“Take my arm; and I want you to use it.”

She said nothing: she felt subdued by the suddenness of this.

“Come with me. You can’t drive anywhere while you are so cold.”

Silently she went where he led. At the Crossed Keys the festivities filled every part of the house: business in the bar-room, dancing in the parlor, a great deal to eat spread out in the dining-room, and everybody running around. George placed Eva in a warm corner, and a glass of wine was the first thing he brought her, then a shawl belonging to Louisa Fry, for which he had not asked, and food.

“You were badly chilled. You must have come a long way in the rain,” he said, after a while, hoping to find out who she was.

“Yes.”

“And it was too much for you over there.”

She looked disgusted, and did not answer. “Why

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did I go up to that mourners' bench?" she thought. "They were singing, and I felt wicked."

"Would you dance a few minutes — to keep from taking cold?"

"I don't believe you remember me," she said, timidly.

"I never saw you before."

"I was sorry you cut your forehead."

"Were those roses from your hat? Don't say so."

"I had no hat." She said to herself, "Can he really have forgotten all about Sunday night?"

Her half dreamy way was very puzzling. After studying her for a moment he suggested, "Shall we dance now?"

As quietly as before she went with him, but her heart bounded in her breast. "Going to the dance after all! Going to the dance with George Stroh!"

Louisa Fry's parlor was disintegrated for the evening. Every piece of furniture had been carried out; all the fancy draperies had disappeared; the carpet was gone too, and the floor was covered with sand. At one end of the room stood an immense store-box as a platform for the fiddlers, and there they sat, with red, white and blue rosettes in their button-holes, and played and played. The leader called the figures and kept an eye on a cigar-box half full of small change which stood just in front of his feet. As many sets as could crowd upon the floor were performing a quadrille with such vim that the coal-oil lamps on the wall shuddered in their brackets. Nearly all the guests

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were young people who worked hard for a living; and because of the storm they had had to make a special effort to get to the dance. All wore their best clothes; the girls had flowers and ribbons in their hair and on their breasts. There were several Madonna faces among them, and some of the men would have made striking portrait subjects. They were very joyous: many of them were lovers.

A stranger to everyone, with the disadvantage of crushed skirts and dirty shoes, Eva still felt equal to meeting all the lights and all the eyes while those fiddles were going on. The quadrille ended, and George dropped a quarter into the cigar-box, made a sign to the leader to begin again, and hurried her to a place in a set. They were observed thoroughly; the glances at Eva were perforating. Her cheeks glowed, her hand felt cold in her partner's; she was painfully ashamed of her clothes; but she had forgotten to be tired, and her mind was made up to take all the pleasure she could get. She held her head high, and looked as dashing as George when they danced forward.

He found her very light; and he kept watching the fire-flash between her brows. Not much was said while they danced, but at the end of it he began to talk, standing beside her and discouraging every one from coming near. He did the same thing through dance after dance. To draw back the attention of their partners the girls exerted themselves and were as attractive as possible, while the men tried to be

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gallant and bold. Everyone was keyed up. It was a happy evening.

“ But who on earth is she? ” George thought.

When he tried her with English she answered so nicely that they continued with it instead of in the dialect. She said very little, and about herself nothing at all, except that she hardly ever went to Reading: she would like to see the town lighted up. He felt that he was entertaining her, talking about Philadelphia and about Yost's; she asked a question or two about Yost's.

Near the end of an intermission it occurred to him to say, “ Can you waltz? ”

“ Yes. I learned to dance and to speak English from my mother. Before she was married she lived in Philadelphia two years,” confided Eva suddenly.

“ Isn't your mother living? ”

“ No.”

“ Your father? ”

His failure to remember her father was so amusing that she could not quite conceal her laughter. George glanced at her sidewise, experimentally, and she looked upward at him. Both were less charmed than determined to charm. Calling out an order for a waltz, he danced off with her. Only two couples were able to follow, and the many who could not were indignant.

“ Wants to show off! ”

“ Half-breed ways! ”

Though he noted who spoke, George still appeared perfectly benign and good natured. As soon as the

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music stopped he found a pretext to get away. The most secluded spot available was the steps on the garden side of the house. Enough light came from a window for Eva to see the package he produced, holding it ready to hide again instantly.

“What is this?” she inquired.

“Schneeburger snuff.”

“What will you do with such a lot?”

“It’s valuable. For one thing it matches the sand on that floor. We’ll see. Until just now I didn’t really intend to use it.”

She began to laugh quietly. “I needn’t care about the dance because he will take me home,” she thought.

“Will you help? We must have everyone out of the room?”

“That I can manage. Let me get the lay of the land.”

After they had whispered over the plan he said, “You know we may have to run. This same crowd chased a man three quarters of a mile once, and he couldn’t move out of the ditch where they left him.”

“Very well. I’m not a bad runner.”

“Good! I’ll bring my carriage, and we can be in it and away inside of ten seconds.”

“Goodbye.”

As she disappeared he looked after her with admiration. Then he also left the house; and five minutes later he was driving his horse around the corner of the street. Suddenly there came from somewhere out in the dark an energetic contralto scream;

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two more followed, ending with a choke. Every one believed that a scene of struggle and terror and perhaps robbery was going on, concealed by the night, in the direction of the vegetable-garden. The dancers halted, groups on the stairs melted away, the fiddlers threw down their bows, men set their glasses on the bar and shouted for lanterns, and the whole crowded population of the Crossed Keys ran out of doors. It was no longer raining, fortunately.

George made sure with one glance that not a soul could see him, and leaped up the front steps. Crouching in the corners of the deserted parlor, he used his arm like a sower's. The room was all prepared for torture in a minute. Then with Eva at his side he circulated among the search-parties hunting everywhere with their lanterns. One crushed lettuce-head and two broken stalks of sweet-William were all that could be found, though they looked most carefully and talked a great deal.

To quiet the excitement the fiddlers returned to their chairs and began a favorite tune. The young people came back shivering; and the dancing was very lively, with stamping and flirting of skirts. After only a few minutes of this a look of suspicion and discomfort appeared on one face after another. Girls uttered lady-like little sounds, men sneezed discreetly. Polite comments followed.

"Oh, you took cold out in the damp. Do you feel a draught?"

When five sneezed at once their friends regarded

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them questioningly. Conversation grew strained, then ceased; the quadrille kept on, but they did it as if they were wound up. As the acute symptoms spread it became very difficult to dance; soon it was impossible; one and then another set had to stop, the fiddlers too. The whole crowd was afflicted: nice girls, losing interest in everything, leaned with streaming eyes against walls; young men, but now full of gallant feelings, shrank away from their partners and made miserable noises. The most wretched of all was a plump fellow, older than the others, who liked to set a good example; he had not missed a single dance, and he was in love, but he forgot it now. Sitting on the fiddlers' platform beside the money-box, he let the tears roll from his tightly shut eyes down his big, hot cheeks, and once every forty-five seconds he quaked, bowed himself far forward and uttered a great roar. There was something about his performance which suggested grief, thorough-going grief.

George and Eva, standing inconspicuously in the hall where they could watch everything that was going on, pretended not to look. He talked steadily; she held her tongue firmly between her teeth, missed nothing, and had a pitying face. However, the plump man kept his eye on them: a suspicion had entered his mind; and when he was again compelled to make a bow he scooped up a handful of sand from the floor, and examined it gingerly.

“Schneeburger snuff!” he shouted.

There was an outcry: “We must leave this room.

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The dance is done for. The dirty trick! Who did it? ”

“ You needn’t look farther than those two in the hall. Neither of them was here when we heard that screaming. She fooled us with it to get us out, and he threw the snuff.”

George responded, “ Prove that, old Fatty.”

“ Why don’t you deny it? ”

“ That friend of George Stroh’s is a funny one. She has spoken to no one but him all evening,” a girl’s insulting voice put in. “ Who is she anyhow? ” -

“ Yes, what’s her name? Why don’t you introduce her to us. Is she a stranger to you too? ” jeered the plump man.

“ Must you know a stranger’s family history before you can treat her decently? ” George asked, stepping toward him.

“ Are you deaf and dumb, or are you ashamed to tell your name? ” the shrill girl called out.

By this time the crowd had reached a decision on the evidence, and although they still had to pause in their anger and sneeze and crow, their purpose was business-like. The leader’s figure and shrewdness suggested an elephant. Now he raged like one.

“ Ah, don’t waste time talking,” he yelled. “ Stroh did it. Go for him! ”

George and Eva made a dash out of the house. When he swung her into the buggy and sprang in himself the men closed around him, some cursing, and formidable hands grasped at him and at the bridle.

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The horse began to rear in the muddy street; a cut of the whip started him on a run. As he dashed through the town and out of it one convalescing fiddler began to play "Home, Sweet Home."

Around the flying pair the fields spread out like a refuge without limits. The sky hinted at vast altitudes of darkness above where the eye penetrated. After the rain the air was wonderfully sweet and fresh.

Eva drew deep breaths and began to tremble. George was chuckling.

"Did you see the very tall fiddler? Did you see the fellow in the pepper-and-salt suit? And I don't believe fat Clint will get his face back to normal in time for Sunday School."

"Oh! That girl! "

"She has reason for her spiteful tongue. Don't think of her. How was I to tell them your name? "

"They are dreadfully angry at us."

"They'll soon forget it. Why, you mustn't shiver so. Let me put the laprobe around you. Now where are we going? "

"To Mount Misery, back to Mount Misery," was the answer she made to herself. She said, "And you don't remember last Sunday night? "

"What was it I did last Sunday night? Wasn't she fibbing when she said she knew me? " he wondered. He asked, "How can I take you home when I don't know where you live? "

"You must leave me at the foot of the hill."

"What hill? Oh, well, you needn't tell me. I know

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who you are. You are Cinderella! ”

He kissed her as a matter of course.

“What! Don’t jump! Look, I have stopped the horse. I wouldn’t hurt you for the world. I see I made a great mistake.”

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN at last they had all gone their various ways and nobody was left to watch her, Eva came slowly out of the house. She had been able to evade her men-folk, with much help from Helen in the dangerous undertaking, and every evening for a week she had stolen up the path to the top of Mount Misery. Now it was Saturday again, and all the days were challenging and delightful. Although she was sure that George would be waiting at their meeting-place she stopped a while to stroke the lonesome tiger-cat on the fence. Her hand touched large scars under his stripes: he had had to live by his wits before they were developed. He set up a rumbling purr, ran his claws in and out of his big plush paws, and stared at her, while she looked thoughtfully into his shining, slitted eyes.

She went along the crooked footpath, among bushes and boulders and sparse grass, across the new land on the hill-top. From where he leaned against a beech-tree George saw her coming and descended to meet her. A few paces away he halted; her graces were such a surprise and satisfaction that every time he beheld her he wondered afresh. She seemed a stranger in her surroundings.

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“ Good-evening,” he said.

“ Well? ” she answered, absently.

“ It’s always well when I’m with you.”

At that she smiled as if she had just recognized him. Once more he escorted her, a little way over the hill to a seat made by a bed of dry moss and a fallen tree. They shared this spot with the catbirds; it was hidden by thickets in blossom and by three or four trees standing close together, and among crowds of wild roses last year’s black, dead mullein-stalks stood up like spears. Here he lay down, and rejoiced in looking at her. Copper-colored lights shone in the braids around her head; above her fresh dark blue cotton gown her neck was smooth and white.

“ Isn’t she the one? ” he thought.

They were happy passing their evenings with spurts of conversation and long silent intervals; and now she did not say a word. She was both depressed and fascinated. What she wanted with all her heart she might perhaps get — this evening possibly.

“ What have you been doing with yourself today? ” he asked.

The different kinds of work she named showed as much knowledge of farm-management as of house-keeping. “ I was up this morning before four,” she concluded. “ Now the Mount Misery family is all ready for Sunday.”

“ You shouldn’t work so hard.”

“ We must keep the place running,” she answered, coldly.

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“ May I smoke? Ah, that’s better.”

She began to examine some wild strawberry vines that grew within her reach.

“ These will soon be ripe,” she remarked. “ Every year Helen and I go out for a whole day and gather berries to preserve. We look forward to it. They smell so sweet, heaped up in the kettles.”

As she offered him a spray of red berries he caught her hand, and let it go; hard work had coarsened it. The dejected place which was her home spread out under his eyes, and he surveyed it, wondered what sort of fellow her father was, and thought, “ But is she really the one? ”

“ Do you see the mark on that beech? ” he asked, suavely. “ What is it? ”

“ A key-hole.”

“ It is; and if you can get the right key you will find luck. What will your luck be? ”

“ Pretty things, dresses, sashes, beads,” she answered, joyously. “ What do you think I’d have if I could? Not to wear much, just to have. A black velvet dress.”

“ Would that make you happy? ”

“ Indeed it would.”

His repulsion to her poverty vanished. “ She shall have her black velvet,” he said to himself. “ She shall have everything a woman wants.”

Where he lay he could look out between the trees, far out and away from Mount Misery. The west was gorgeous. A reddish glow covered miles and miles of

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That was applause which satisfied him. He said, "It is time for our bird."

A star or two had appeared, and it had become dusky in the valley: two or three lights began to burn in lonely farmhouses; a field on Mount Misery glowed white with daisies. Out of a treetop came a soft warbling; it was as brief as sweet.

"I can never do as well as that. It has sung to us every night this week — every night this week, Eva."

"If he had nothing and needed a home, if he were to come to Mount Misery and work there, I could be perfectly contented," she said to herself.

The long silence that followed was happy.

"I don't know whether I could measure up to this man, he is so splendid," she joyfully thought. "But if ever I am with him I shall do my very best. It will be if it is to be."

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

Averting her smiling eyes, she said, "All these flowers around us remind me of some verses in a book I have, a very old book. When my grandmother was a girl it was old."

"Can you say the verses?"

She began quietly to repeat them. It was a folk-song with the refrain, "Guard thyself, fair floweret," in which a most profound fatalism found vivid expression; at the end came a change to a brief mood of triumph. With her eyes fixed upon the shadowy hills she appeared like a Mænad in trouble about her soul.

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George was always hopeful of finding women in general both beautiful and womanly. He was willing to think them so, although he had learned to conceal it. The handsome country boy had had painful snubs as well as plenty of other experiences to make him wary. Here were beauty and womanliness in a high degree, and alluring vitality, all where he had never thought of finding them.

"She is what she seemed to be when I first saw her in the tent, weeping, dear little soul," was his thought. "Her tears were honest."

"I want to tell you something," he said. "I never spoke of it to anyone."

He told all about the strange young woman with the boy and the lame rat-terrier, who had come to Yost's in his childhood and captivated him. Eva listened eagerly, wanting to know his life.

"And what happened? "

"Nothing happened. I don't know who they were or what became of them."

"Then why is it important? "

"That woman was different from anyone I ever saw." His expression changed, his tone softened.

"What style? "

"Tall, with a bright color and red hair."

"You saw a great deal for a little boy."

"I remember her as sad and rather frightened."

"Was anything done for her, do you think? "

"Surely. Father was always helping people in trouble."

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“But she had to beg! She was in need and frightened, and she had to come and beg.”

Both became absorbed in what they were thinking. He said to himself, “It brings Eva close to have told her that. She is nearer to me now than anyone else in the world.”

To Eva the contrast suddenly became intolerable between him, with his air of wellbeing and all the dignity of Yost’s back of him, and herself and all poor souls. She had nothing but her beauty, and the buttercups and chipmunks had that.

“You don’t know what it is to be poor,” she thought. “You never went without a necessary thing in your life. What you want you get; and you don’t earn it.”

Among the starlit mountains they were seemingly the only two human beings, with the rustling, sweet night wind to keep them company. He drew her out of the shadow of the leaves, so that he could see her face.

“You are looking at me savagely.”

In her softest voice she asked, “When will you come to our house? ”

“I thought you made me sneak up here and sit with the rabbits on account of your father and brother.”

“I can’t bear this way.”

“You want me to come, and yet you are afraid to have me. What am I to do? ”

Her spirit with all its energy seemed to leap and strain forward to meet what was due to it. “I shouldn’t need to be ashamed of my wretched home if

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you were about to take me away," was the answer she suppressed. She sat in excited silence.

"What does it matter where?" he said. "When I first caught sight of you it was as if some one said to me, 'See her, see her, — in this common world!'"

He debated with himself: "She is the one. Why don't I settle it? No." To be a little negligent of this great thing and to let it wait befitted him. Very much lay within his powers, and he was not bound at all, still quite free to choose. He thought, luxuriously, "Not yet. After a while."

"I must go home now," she said, in a quiet voice.

Although she allowed him to kiss her she went through it patiently, thinking her own thoughts, which were sad.

CHAPTER IX

ALTHOUGH the weather had turned so cloudy that the late-rising moon could not be seen, some light came from the sky. The atmosphere was mysterious, neither dark nor clear, and meadows and fields looked wonderfully soft gray or almost black; as always late in the night the mountains seemed alive, and possessed of powers of enchantment. Yost's church, standing conspicuously on high ground, appeared dim white and unreal; the marble angel was like a white shadow, and the grave-stones made white spots in the grass. A horse tied to a tree stood waiting patiently. Out across the churchyard and over the fields came rolling wave after wave of music.

Inside the church the darkness formed an indistinct concave; thick shadows were under the galleries and behind the altar; dust falling out of the woodwork, which had been carved zealously a hundred years before, made the chilly air impure. What light there was came from one candle burning near the organ, and in the midst of the small, glowing area George Stroh's face appeared very brilliantly colored. On the way homeward he had stopped his horse again and again, to write on the backs of old envelopes the music and words that came to him of themselves; and now he had

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to sing. He felt as if with no effort he could pour out voice enough to fill an amphitheatre made by the hills.

Ages long has been my time of wanting.
In my lonesome dream she waited somewhere;
But I thought my dream a shining phantom,
Sought with little hope; and I have found her.

Pure is she and fair beyond my vision:
Warm and fair as roses in the sunlight,
Pure as dawn above the snowy mountains.

Nothing moves on earth that shall deprive me.
Death shall serve to make my love immortal.
Mine to keep for all time! Come, my dearest.
Twilight and the homeward road are ready.

“It’s good,” he thought, when he had sung it through several times. “But I shall do far better with her beside me than I can do alone. I’ll wait no longer; I will ask for her hand tomorrow night. She is like hot sunshine. We shall be marvellously happy. She will be my wife; her name will be Eva Stroh, and she will live in our house, and sit down there in Mother’s pew. Here where Father preached she will bring my children to church. I shall have her with me year after year; and when we lie out there in the grave-yard we shall be side by side, and the wind will blow over the two of us, and together we shall listen to the music every Sunday.”

He looked about him with quick, purposeless glances, at the candle, at his scattered bits of paper, then down

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across the church. It seemed that noiseless feet were mounting the steps to the dusky pulpit, and that in a moment the sounding-board would reflect a mellow, grave voice that was heard no more.

“Father! I can almost see you in your place. Listen. I have found her. You have not forgotten? I am the only one to carry on your name, and in my son you will have another earthly life.”

Making a great effort to return to an ordinary frame of mind, he picked up a prayer-book, opened it and read here and there on a page:

“And although we by our sins have well earned Thy just wrath and every sort of punishment; yet we pray, O true and merciful Father, from the depths of our souls, that Thou wilt not think of the sins of our youth. — Preserve us graciously — from all anguish of heart, and especially from unbearable, intense temptation of the soul, and an evil, sudden death.”

Without knowing what he read he closed the book. The tension of his eager spirit would not break; it increased. His feeling reached two ways. His devotion to his father which had governed him in the past now sent him forward.

“Eva! Eva! ”

CHAPTER X

THE hour when George waited secretly for Eva on the hilltop was beautiful at Yost's. While the tall, mottled button-ball trees along the water still had sunlight on their upper branches, dark shadows covered the grass. The orioles and redwings were making their last flights for the day and singing brief songs. Yost's and the Northkill belonged together; the sound of ripples and the mists, morning and evening, were a part of life there. Christiana loved the stream, which brought fertility and was the blessing of the place, and felt confidence in it as in a friend. Up near the top of the Blue Mountain an immense spring which was the source of the creek rose in some woodland of hers; and before leaving her jurisdiction it had a long way to flow, for the land on both sides pertained to the Yost estate. From the stone bridge through the meadows to the house there was about a mile of little rapids and glossy shallows and jade-green depths.

In early spring sometimes for a few hours the peaceful stream rose raging out of all bounds, so Grandfather Yost had located the buildings on the higher western side, two terraces above the road. There were so many of them—barns, smoke-house, distillery, bake-oven and spring-house, all made of the same kind

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of stone — that strangers often mistook them for a little village. Large spruces and hemlocks kept the terraces rather dark. The elderly boxwood and flowering shrubs had to get along as well as they could without much sunlight, and moss grew around the flagstone path leading to the front door. To own that carved Georgian doorway was a distinction. On each side of it stood a white bench, and a clipped arbor-vitae tree as straight as a sentry. The house-front, eight windows broad, had dignity; against the blue-gray stone, which was as clean as if just quarried on the mountain, the woodwork looked sharply white. It was a very quiet place, much quieter than in Paul Stroh's time.

This was the evening of the tea-party. The material part of it was over, and the guests had come out for air. Sunk in a rocking-chair, away from the women, Luther Shell remained motionless with his cigar. His eyes were half closed, his drapery-like attitude would soon rub the newness out of his spring suit, and he looked particularly apple-cheeked. Mary, who was always expected at these festivities of her elders, had wandered down to the gate, where she watched the passing water with an acquiescent expression. Louisa Fry was established on one white bench, in a very rigid attitude, because of her regard for the good brown silk which immersed her in knife-pleatings, ruffles and puffs. On the other bench, opposite her life-long friend, Christiana sat at rest. Her head, with slightly gray hair plaited and crimped, and her deep-bosomed figure, in a lavender gown that lay

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in broad folds, suggested sculpture rather than painting. The orbits of her gray eyes were unusually deep above ruddy cheeks, and she had a slow smile with a dimple.

She felt concerned about Louisa now. At their parties they went over each other's minor affairs thoroughly, forgetting Luther for long periods, as they had done when Mary's mother took an active part; but this evening it was alarming to see how the genial Louisa Fry scorned every innocent topic and fairly bit it off. Christiana decided to look into this, and set about it.

"Are you still worn out after Battalion Day, Louisa?"

"How can I rest? Maybe this is the last Battalion Day that Middleport people will ever see."

"Why so?" Christiana inquired. She thought, "Can it be possible that Louisa has been upset by that queer preacher across the way from her?"

"Don't I always get up all celebrations that we have here?"

"Certainly. Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, I feel well." That many important matters were not well, all wrong, suppressed out of pure politeness, was implied by Louisa's tone.

"Then why shouldn't there be another Battalion Day next year?"

"It was too lively; and I couldn't get rid of the people, I couldn't chase them off. Even after I saw the last of them headed for home I couldn't straighten

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things out, so tired I was.”

“So it didn’t pay you?”

“Oh, it paid me. Beer flowed that day! Indeed it seemed that they would swim in it. Even my old Molly — wouldn’t you think that after living at my place thirty-one years my Molly would be used to beer? — even she was out as soon as it was light, hunting for her teeth, which she had dropped in Troxel’s corn-field. And my table-cloth!” Now that she was started Louisa went along on her own power. “I got the fruit-stains out finally; with much rubbing and much bleaching and much worry. I know one thing: never again my best table-cloth on Battalion Day! But it set off the pies so, and indeed they were worthy of it, for my vanilla-pie is such a pie that the first piece makes you want another and the second makes you sick. Now it is all over, and I am thankful; and George’s snuff —.”

“How often have I promised myself that the next time I wouldn’t come?” Luther was thinking. “But I always do come. What would they talk about if I were not here? We are a queer crowd to be sitting around together. Three women, one man; three workers, one drone; three middle-aged people, one child; and that is the greatest difference of all.”

Hearing Louisa mention George and the snuff, he spoke quite loud, and also made Christiana a little bow.

“I congratulated George on his luck in getting the lady he had to drive with him in the parade.”

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Christiana was much pleased. "I am perfectly satisfied with my son," she said.

Nobody replied to that. Luther, meeting Louisa's eye, slightly contorted his smiling, sceptical face.

Mary came wandering back from the water just then.

"I am glad you had Battalion Day while Father is still here, Aunt Louisa," she said. "He enjoyed it so much."

"Are you going away again, Luther?" Christiana asked.

"Going to leave his loom while customers offer big prices because he makes prettier carpets than any other weaver in the county. Going to tramp the swamps among the bullfrogs, sleep by the roadside and sell rush mats at back doors!" Louisa almost intoned. "And he a lawyer in early life! Was justice of the peace until he resigned."

"Louisa, whom do you think the democratic convention will nominate?"

This made Louisa look into space with such displeasure that Christiana interposed. She had a way which could soothe and disarm. "I hope you agree with me; but if you do not I have done my best; and I should be very sorry to hurt your feelings," was expressed by her frank, gentle look, when she had dropped a curt word.

"And where are you going, Luther?" she said.

Luther would not have answered that question from anyone else in the world. The dialect, he

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thought, never sounded so soft as when Christiana used it.

“Along the Northkill first, for rushes. Then I shall camp somewhere for a while, and dry them and make a stock of mats; and then I shall start off. I don’t know how far I’ll go. It would all be spoiled if I knew that. How I hate a calendar!”

“You like the swampy places, don’t you?”

“Christiana, I feel the summer coming along, and I can’t breathe in a house. I want to tramp beside the creek, and have all the time there is. When I go wading after rushes, with the wind from far off running over them and the sunshine on the pools, and when I lie on the ground and hear the water moving and see the sky full of stars, I know what it is to be happy. Some time I mean to go far away from here, along the sea-coast. I want to find out whether fish in the creek have the same ideas as fish in the big water. If I have to die before I get acquainted with the ocean I shan’t rest.”

This was much more of an explanation than Luther had ever given; Christiana appreciated the fact.

“Mary,” she said. “I want you to come here while your father is away.”

“I have urged her to visit me,” Louisa stated, coldly.

“At home I can work faster than anywhere else, Aunt Christiana; and I have so many wedding orders, dresses as well as other things to make for three brides,” Mary answered. On went her weary

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thoughts: "Nothing that I have to do has any hope in it. Sewing for my living, trying to have patience with Father, years and years of tea-parties —."

"Mary! Time to go."

As they all stood up Luther moved close to Louisa and unexpectedly put his arm around her tight. She gave a short shriek, and struggled; then almost immediately they were down near the gate, walking side by side and talking confidentially.

"After being on the edge of a quarrel all evening," Christiana thought. "Louisa has something on her mind; that is what makes her so crabbed; and it is about me."

It gave her great comfort and satisfaction to know that her companion cared enough for her to find fault with her ways.

Luther was saying, in a low tone, "Don't do it. You know nothing about all this."

"I do know. Since we talked it over I have heard from all sides that George Stroh was recognized three or four evenings this week in the neighborhood of Mount Misery."

"What does that prove? "

"With what Dan told me about the window and what I saw at the dance it's enough."

"What sort of fellow may Hain be, who can't look after his own daughter? How did you become acquainted with him? "

"He was at my place two years ago, on business, and I gave him a late supper. Once in a while he

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rides over and stays to a meal with me. I told you that the other day. I like Dan Hain."

"If you think well of Dan Hain I don't see why you don't want George to go there, if that is what George is doing. What are you afraid of?"

One troublous possibility after another went through Louisa's mind. She answered, sadly, "I am afraid that sorrow will come to Christiana."

"Stand by her if it does, but don't get her all ready for it. Suppose he married the girl, would you want Christiana to start out with a prejudice? You couldn't stop him any more than you could start him in a matter of this kind. Besides, a young man has a right to his mistakes."

"Don't you care what happens to Christiana?"

"I do care. Christiana has been through enough," Luther answered.

"I wish you thought she should be forewarned."

"I do not think so. If you tell her don't come to me with any lamentations."

"I won't."

After Luther had taken a ceremonious leave, Christiana and Louisa stood side by side and watched the tall, flexible figure and the small, white one going away along the road.

"How pretty she is in that sheer dress!" Christiana said.

"That dress has been her best for three summers. Well, when I am gone the dear little thing will find that she can have everything full and plenty," Louisa

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answered, and her eyes filled.

As they went back to the benches and sat down again Christiana felt so rich and happy in this old friendship that she was all ready to laugh.

“Well?” she said, teasingly. “What do you want to say to me that Luther thinks you shouldn’t?”

One glance at her face and bearing strengthened Louisa’s opinion that here was a woman who was debarred by nature from hearing gossip.

“Christiana,” she said, and looked away, down toward the water.

“Yes?”

Calm though she appeared, in that pause Christiana was asking herself, “Oh, what is coming? Is it that or this?”

CHAPTER XI

SO IT had come, thought Christiana: what she had been dreading had come. She lay in her large four-post bed, straight and dignified, covered to her chin with smooth white, and a moonbeam shone over her and made her eyes glitter. Odors of the meadows and of the June night and its flowers floated about her; she heard the clock strike and the Northkill murmur. If the spirits of her dead walked that night, they went not only to Yost's Church but to Yost's dwelling. Grandfather Yost looked to his own. The fear that some common, hateful girl might appear any day, seeking George and making loud demands, had accompanied Christiana for seven years. Now what she had heard from Louisa seemed to imply the worst possible, and she prayed.

The next morning, however, the sun shone. Asceticism did not exist at Yost's, Sunday was something of a holiday; and although the whole time she sat in church her mind was not free of the thing, the minister preached about trusting in the Lord. When she set out on her Sunday inspection, in the early afternoon, each step upon her own ground made her more serene. She went through barns and stables, walked from field to field of her domain and saw it

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all prosperous. Summer had come fast. In the sunshine the bends of the creek shone like mirrors; the lindens hummed with bees; every breath of wind brought down a shower of locust-blossoms. There was peace throughout Yost's.

"The best happiness, when one comes to die, is to leave a good piece of work done," she reflected.

Although George as manager should have been with her he had not presented himself. When she was ready for him she searched, and found him in the strawberry-patch, in a blaze of sunlight, selecting and eating berries while he meditated. He looked up as she approached, and began to toss three berries into the air and catch them. It did not seem to her then that matters could be bad at all.

"He is fully as handsome as his father. My ugly face did not spoil him," she thought.

She led the way to the front of the house, and placed herself where she had sat the evening before. Her hands lay quiet in her lap; she looked happy, as she really was; conscious of being surrounded by fertile, sunny spaces which belonged to her, and with her big son loafing where she could touch him if she wished. It was hard to begin fault-finding, he was so wonderfully lovable; she wanted to disregard the whole foolish thing.

"Aunt Louisa told me some news last evening," she began.

"What had Aunt Louisa to say? Is she still cross about my snuff?" he asked, merrily.

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"No, it isn't that. She had to tell me that you have been paying marked attention to a young lady. It seems there is much talk about a handsome saddle-horse, supposed to come from our place, tied in the woods on the east side of Mount Misery evening after evening."

George swore to himself at being so caught. As his mother went on to give a lightly stressed account not only of the dance but of Louisa's friend's front window, he swore more.

"A friend of Aunt Louisa?" he inquired.

"Yes. I was surprised too."

He took a few moments to consider these revelations, wondering whether there were anything else of such importance which Eva had not told him.

"Why did Aunt Louisa come to you with it?" he demanded. "This is not the first girl I have gone to see."

"Her bar-keeper came laughing, and told her that a conspicuous sort of a young woman, oddly dressed, was in religious hysterics for the preacher's benefit, over in that gospel tent where they make so much noise in the evenings. Aunt Louisa didn't give it a thought until the stranger appeared, all muddy and excited, with you."

After his exalted mood of the night, the bar-keeper! It shocked George that such an impression of what was dear to him could exist. The whole affair had been put before his mother in the most frightful light.

"What did she do to invite you in through the

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window?" Christiana inquired, with cheerful composure. "She must have done something."

He was dumb and helpless. He could remember nothing about what Eva had done, or what he had done either. Also he perceived that he would have a piece of work to set all this right.

"Don't you know?" Christiana asked. "You haven't realized what you are about. That is why I speak of it. You should be careful of any young woman, even though she is over-willing. Secret meetings with you make this foolish girl the subject of scandalous talk. Her father is Aunt Louisa's friend, and he took the trouble to bring you home. If Aunt Louisa were mistaken in her friend we should have a good chance to pay blackmail. But I want to hear what you have to say about it."

During this vigorous talk her candid eyes dwelt upon him with the greatest devotion; she was so straightforward that he was not antagonized.

"You heard a very harsh account," he replied.

"Are you engaged, then, as some of the busy-bodies say?"

"Not yet. I should have told you, very likely, before the day is over."

"Ah!" she thought. "At least he did not lie."

She delayed a while, and then spoke with marked gentleness. "Let me hear about this young girl." — "He is used to telling me the good points of things he wants to acquire," she added, to herself.

He seized the chance, was brief, and thought he

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understated; but to her he seemed the incarnation of youth and enthusiasm and joy.

The end of his account was, "You must see Eva, Mother. She is very beautiful."

"A beauty? Must I put up with that?" Christiana thought. She asked "What else is she?"

"She is very clever."

"I am glad to hear that. What did you talk about last evening?"

After doing his best to recall something striking George answered, "She recited a poem."

"Clever enough to make you talk," Christiana annotated, mentally. "I should rather not have a daughter-in-law from a two-horse farm," she remarked. "There is always a weak spot in conspicuous poverty. However, we can pass over that. Is she a capable house-keeper?"

"She has had to be," he answered, pitying Eva.

"Is she fond of children?"

"She is altogether womanly."

"And a good girl, George?"

A passionate vision flashed into his mind of the lovely young maiden weeping for her sins; but that he would not discuss.

"Mother," he said. "She is all I wish for in your daughter and Father's."

"You think your father would have taken to her, do you?" In one moment her manner was calm again, and again confusing. "So you are sure, my dear, that she is the wife for you? 'Forsaking all

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others, — so long as you both shall live! ’ ’ ”

“ That is how I want her.”

“ You know what the Yosts have always been. You are heir not only to what we have but all we represent. You are responsible to those who are gone; they gave you life, they prepared for you. Your marriage should bring new strength to our family; our traditions will devolve upon your wife, and she will take my place.”

“ I don’t want to think of anyone taking your place. You have always been the kindest mother.” He felt how perfectly she played her dignified part, even while he proceeded. “ Eva would be graceful in any position.”

“ My boy, you are too certain. After an acquaintance of only a few days you are sure that she could take the place of your mother.”

At this point George found so much directness less agreeable in her than a little finesse. He could not think of the right thing to say.

“ A week is not long enough to select a wife for my son. I want you to promise to wait three months; I want you not to communicate with her during that time.”

“ Do you think I would do that? Not knowing who was trying to get her away from me? ”

“ Have you met so many young men there? ”

Now he felt completely at sea as to what his mother might do next; he stiffened in his determination.

“ Poor boy! ” Christiana was thinking. “ You

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expect to form your girl; but it is much more likely that she would make you over! ”

She said, “I want you to take time. This Miss Hain behaves without dignity in public; she is greedy for pleasure; she is bold and reckless. We know all that. Having been always obliged to pinch, she is pretty sure to be a spendthrift — .”

“How you run her down! It is ridiculous.”

“Now I have given you good reasons — .”

“I told you what I intend to do. You talk as if it were quite out of the question.”

“Didn’t you show by your own words how absurd all this is?” Christiana demanded.

She could have shaken him for being so swayed by tints and curves and soft attentions; but her anger was only momentary, it died away. For some minutes she let him sit there sullen.

“All the time that you and I have been here alone together — .”

Her voice was gentle. When she paused he could not help remembering those long, pleasant, smooth years, the fields turning from green to brown and then to white, wonderful Christmases and birthdays, his mother always there, at her desk on snowy afternoons, busy on the other side of the lamp while he learned his lessons.

“What have I denied you?” she softly asked. “I didn’t object even when you wanted to be a missionary.”

“No, you didn’t object. You asked me to wait,

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sent me to Philadelphia, told me not to be sparing of money; and on the way down I wished that all the way-stations were heathen temples and all the passengers savages, so I could convert them; and when I came back it was not religion but music and more music that I had in my head."

"And then I furthered that, gave you all you wanted, sent you away to study music. What have you lost by being born my son? Now I only ask for three months. That's not much. Do you owe nothing, no loyalty, to the memory of our life together? Do you want to break it short off? "

"What has that to do with this? "

"George, listen. Since you were a little boy your welfare has been my only object — in everything I have done — God knows, in everything. Promise what I ask. It is due me."

"If you have loved me why do you want to keep love from me? No. My father would not have that right."

It was the first time he had ever admitted in the slightest that the tie to his father was the dearer tie. She grasped at that instantly.

"Would you promise your father? Are you sure he is not asking it of you? "

"I won't leave her. I believe she loves me. I won't lose her," he answered, violently. "And you talk about loyalty! "

The thought, "I should have given the same answer once," almost made Christiana smile. She answered,

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“ If Eva Hain is ready to marry you now, how can you think that she would accept another man within three months? ”

“ Oh, what do I care for all this? I won't argue and reason about it.”

“ But give her time! She has been acquainted with you only a week. How does she know whether or not she can do without you? ”

“ I tell you I will not make that promise.”

“ Then, my dear, I must reason for you. I forbid you to see this girl, write to her or communicate with her in any way until I give you permission.”

“ You forbid? I'm a man.”

“ And what have you? ” She looked about her, ostentatiously. “ It appears to me that Yost's is a good deal to sacrifice.”

“ Very well. I have what Father left — .”

“ One hundred and twenty-five dollars a year,” Christiana said, and laughed.

“ Oh, I'll work! I'll make my own way. What do I care? ”

“ And you think she will feel the same? My dear boy! ”

“ This is all because she is poor, Mother. You were an important young woman.”

He looked around, at the land his forefathers had cleared and the house where he had expected to live to the end of his life, with a famishing look. His mother, watching him, felt contempt for all passion.

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“Do you expect me to put up with this?” he burst out.

“No. If you did you would not be my son. We may leave the property out of the question,” she calmly answered.

“Then what are you driving at? You can’t force me.”

Her countenance was quiet as a cloud; her eyes were pensive; but they held his changeable eyes. She said nothing.

“O-oh!”

“Now you will give me your word.”

“I give you my word. Let me go.”

CHAPTER XII

HURRYING, not noticing where he walked, George went and sat in a willow thicket by the water-side.

“ I couldn’t stand out when she looked like that,” he thought. “ It was impossible.”

His eyes fixed upon the heavy water. He was overpowered by his mother. This was not the first time he saw her so: once before he had encountered that aspect of magnetic rock.

“ What a woman she is! A powerful woman! ”

Before daylight the morning of his father’s funeral he had been wakened by loud weeping and the solemn voices of strangers. The idea of death, incomprehensible, awful death near him, drove him to hide in the woodhouse where he could shut himself up. He was hunted and found and hurried through the great crowd and confusion. Then he walked to church beside his mother in her sweeping black, with the bell tolling and a little sultry rain falling, and the long procession winding behind. Nobody having cautioned him not to speak, he said, “ Mother.” The word sounded very loud, and she did not answer, and he felt ashamed.

“ How Father’s people lamented around the grave! ”

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About the rest of the day he could not remember much. After sunset suddenly everyone was gone; his mother and he were quite alone at Yost's.

“ Those visitors, so many, with their good intentions — how did she get rid of them all? ”

She had changed her black for a cotton working-dress, and had given him something to eat and told him to go to bed; but she did not notice whether he went or not, and he was afraid to go. Through the long dusk and by lamplight she swept and dusted, swept and dusted. It seemed to the child tagging after her that the world had stopped with his father. There was nothing but night and dust flying and scratchings of a broom. He sat on a chair until she wanted to move it, or fell asleep in the corner of a sofa and woke up and cried a little, but she never spoke. His terror of her, not seeing him, not hearing him, his panic at the sight of her stony face, was such that he did not know what was to become of him. When she went on to another room he followed, for it appeared that if he did not keep himself before her eyes she would forget him forever, and where she was not working it was dark.

When she began her second task he had trotted beside her frantically, for even while he looked straight at her he felt as if he were being lost, lost forever. She paused in one room after another, and cast her eyes over it, and collected things. She put together Paul Stroh's clothes, his fur coat, watch and cuff-buttons; she brought out his guns and fishing-tackle, his hand-

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some saddle, trunk and travelling-bag. After removing one picture from the wall she gathered up other likenesses of him which were about the house; going through and through his desk, she stripped it. Dozens of manuscripts, all his intimate belongings, books by the armful, the chair in which he sat to write, the chair that stood at the head of the table, everything he had, she carried or dragged out of the house, with frightful energy. Then she took apart the bed on which he died. When all were heaped on a bare spot of ground away from the trees she set fire to them.

“The things Father used every day — she destroyed them all, every one. She never hesitated. The fire was slow to catch. Then how it burned! It took a long time to burn out. Father was gone and she could not bear to live with what had been his. She was in agony. No one could have halted her. When she looks like that I believe she could beat down anything.”

Back into the house again, he after her. This time she opened her own desk; and she went out to the stable with her revolver in her hand. Paul Stroh's big, cream-colored horse was asleep on his feet, but he woke up, and had begun to recognize her when the report sounded. He did not suffer: he was dead before he touched the straw.

What fear he had felt, stumbling behind her as she returned to her fire! It was now a heap of smouldering wood, with scraps of metal and charred leather protruding through the ashes. While she stood look-

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ing at it a robin sang. It was morning all of a sudden; and gradually there came over her face a smiling change. She had gone to the edge of the terrace, and tossed her wedding-ring through the white mist into the Northkill.

“The ring Father put on her hand in marriage, — she threw that away! Then she had nothing left of him but me. No one could have halted her.”

Very slowly George's paralysis passed away. None of this which had moulded him was forgotten, but he began to relive the night before and its beauty, he called up a vision of Eva and brooded over it. His will-power in returning hurt him like the return of blood to a compressed foot. He felt the rage of abortiveness; it made him sick.

“Three months! That means for good and all. Eva will not forgive it. It's a crazy business. What shall I do? I can't stand it. I must get to the Seven Stars.”

By five o'clock he was drunk.

CHAPTER XIII

EARLY in the morning the next Saturday Luther Shell's voice could be heard at the Crossed Keys, he was singing so heartily, — not any song, a solo of many syllables made up as he went along; it became less loud at moments but never stopped. He was dressing; his toilet did not progress rapidly, for he kept wandering all around the room from one thing to another, and much time passed while he gazed at himself in the glass. Frogen, a blunt-headed dog, half collie, half bull-dog, also wandered, close to Luther's feet or under them. His soft ears were alert, his plummy tail half-masted, his brown eyes plaintive. A walk was certain, a long walk; but that he would be invited was very uncertain.

The word "Father," came gently from outside the door.

Luther halted, his song ceased, his beaming face grew suspicious instantly. He knew what was about to be said and he got ready for it.

"Shall I put breakfast on the table?"

"Mary!" he shouted. "I don't want you to come to that door, not another time! Can't you give me any peace? Let breakfast wait! Is this house run for

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us, or do we exist to keep it going? ” As Mary’s footsteps retreated rapidly, he said the rest to himself.

After several more circumnavigations he was happy again, and resumed his chant. He looked young, in overalls faded to a beautiful blue and a black shirt which set off his red cheeks. When he had quite finished dressing he stood a while and contemplated some treasures. Arranged on a chair, they made an interesting still-life full of angles and curves; they were a hat, a stick, a pouch and an oilcloth-covered pack strapped to a board. And with them he was about to live a romance. Though he knew everything in the pouch intimately he emptied it and made a thorough inspection: knives, scissors, needles, thread and twine, all sharp or tough as they ought to be. He replaced them.

He was bustling toward the door, singing gayly, when a doubt insinuated itself into his mind and made him go back again. His song sank to a hum; he felt all over the neat pack and dug it with his thumbs. Then he called, “ Mary! ”

“ What’s wrong, Father? ” she answered, hurrying through the hall.

“ Did I put in my shears? ”

“ Aren’t they here anywhere? ”

Luther’s eyes became very bright blue, his face red.

“ I hate an uncertain answer. Now must I get down on my knees and unstrap — ? ”

“ No, Father, I’ll look.”

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“Don’t you do it! Touch that pack and you’ll spoil it. Darn the luck!”

“Do you remember where the shears were?”

“I think I saw them on the bureau,” Luther said, with long pauses. “Between my tobacco and my spectacle-case. Now had I those shears there? Oh, thunderation!”

“I’ll give you mine. It’s a good pair,” Mary said, trying not to laugh.

“I won’t do that. I won’t do that at all. Then I’ll find mine, and I’ll have two pairs. I want to take everything I need, and nothing else. Last night when I strapped it I thought that this was the neatest pack I ever made up.” Uttering these remarks in a loud, monotonous voice and looking very angry, Luther stamped across the floor and stamped back. Then he stopped. “What’ll I do?” he asked, mournfully.

“Leave it as it is; and if you don’t find your shears buy new ones.”

“They wouldn’t be good.”

“Can’t you remember? Where do you think yours are?”

“I don’t think they are anywhere!” Luther wildly cried. “I don’t know one thing about it, whether I had them here, or whether I hadn’t them at all.” He began to swear, oldfashioned profanity.

“It’s a mystery to me why you want shears,” Mary said, flaring up.

“Eh? That’s plain enough.”

“It’s not plain to me. If you choose to go off and

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live like a tramp for two or three months why not do it consistently? I wouldn't make mats. I wouldn't take a toothbrush or anything."

She marched out of the room. Luther, grinning, began laboriously to undo his pack. Before he had it open she was back again.

"I'm sorry, Father."

"All right, all right."

"Father dear, I wish you wouldn't go."

"You have two invitations to visit," Luther grunted.

"I'd rather stay in my own home."

"And you think I ought to want the same. Like a great many people you mistake your personal preferences for the moral law. Now I don't hanker after my own home at present. Go for a walk, Frogen? "

"Won't you at least spend the nights decently at hotels? Don't sleep in the fields and beg from the farmers' wives. And take another suit for Sundays."

"Mary, there is one house where they call me the Erl-king. They think I am so quaint. Isn't that nice? Being the Erl-king I couldn't go to a hotel; and it is late in the day to urge me to keep Sunday, in my clothes or otherwise. There! There are my shears. I had them all the time."

"Father," said Mary, desperately. "You know it will not be good for you."

"Why not? "

He glared at her so that she could not venture to say why not, or to hint at what he would be doing off and on. Dejectedly she went out of the room, away

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to another part of the house, to escape from her father's piercing snorts. A knock at the front door changed the direction of her steps.

The caller, whom she had never happened to meet before, kept his back toward the Crossed Keys, and she glanced past him and saw Louisa Fry on her own porch, much interested in that deliberate back. At the gate there was a shabby carriage, and in it a girl whose strained attitude and feverish look suggested something blighted at the time of bloom.

"That's she," Mary thought, and turned her eyes away.

She had heard the gossip, plenty of it, since Battalion Day. Now her politeness was mechanical. What Daniel Hain asked made no impression on her. He did not seem embarrassed, but as he went back to the carriage he looked anywhere except in the direction of Louisa Fry. The beauty when he approached her refused to move.

"You wanted to come," he said, gently.

"I don't want to stay."

"You wouldn't be satisfied unless you could drive to Middleport and see the weaver yourself."

"Oh, what do I care about the weaver?"

"If you are not pleased, at least behave sensibly. I left my work to bring you here. Be amiable to oblige me."

"I can't. I can't!"

"Can't what? Listen, Eva. You must show some dignity. You have a home and a father to take care

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of you, and you need not depend on anyone else."

This was the first time Daniel had implied that he understood what she had been about, and her present pretext for getting to George Stroh's neighborhood. She stepped down from the carriage. Her eyes were like those of a wild and miserable cat or something equally without knowledge of how to suffer. After one glance at Mary, without noticing the surroundings, she relapsed into indifference. Daniel, surmising a great deal, had had three anxious weeks. Now came a moment of pleasure. He saw the garden lying in sunshine and full of ruffly little roses, pinks and corn-flowers; the air smelt of dewy herbs, and he drew deep breaths. Mary's small house, plastered pink with green woodwork, was hardly more opulent than Mount Misery; but to him the dustless room into which she conducted them seemed elegant as well as homelike, and it made him think hopefully of his own plans. Through the deep windows the hot morning light looked cool; the wainscoting was green, the wooden furniture painted the same shade and decorated with little designs of fruit. Daniel possessed an eye for skill and nicety: he observed the macramé cover on the well-used piano, the rug knitted of many narrow strips of silk useless for any other purpose, and the framed wreath of lilies made of white feathers. Trousseau-work spread out on the table attracted Eva, and with an irritable and capricious air she began to finger the crocheted lace and patient tucks. Mary frowned a little. She repressed a great deal of excite-

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ment as she went on her dangerous mission to her father.

The pack had been strapped, but there was still no peace for Frogen, for Luther had resumed his parading about. He looked all ready to explode.

"Father," Mary said, in her very gentlest way, not to disturb his sensibilities. "There are people waiting to see you."

"Who?"

"I don't know them. I think they are Aunt Louisa's friend Daniel Hain and his daughter. I think I have seen him come and go at the Crossed Keys."

"You think! What brings them here?"

"I believe they want carpet," she admitted.

"Mary! Why did you let them in? Didn't I tell you not ten minutes ago that I am going to start immediately?"

"Father, they will hear you."

"Let them hear me! I don't care who hears me. All the time I have wasted already! Because you said I ought to wait for settled weather. And day before yesterday, a beautiful day too, you took away my boot to be patched. It was so unnecessary!"

"We are not sure what they want."

"Whatever it is, I won't do it. I am going to have my own way for once if I am an old man."

"Father, when you call yourself old it sounds silly. You look like a handsome man of forty except when you are out of humor."

"I am not out of humor. You have made up your

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mind that I must stay at home and work at that rattling old loom." He kicked the loom, and it shook. "I wouldn't make another carpet — ! How many times must I tell you to go and get rid of those people? "

"I won't do that, no matter how often you tell me."

Out she sailed, with her head high; and Luther felt quite proud of her, and followed promptly. He observed the beauty, the sombre man, and the carriage at the gate, and reflected, "What an unpleasant disposition that girl appears to have! That's a stylish turnout. Not a thing been done to it since he used it for courting."

Daniel inquired whether they could have some carpet woven.

"You come at the wrong time. I am going away," Luther answered, roughly. "Anyhow I work as a favor only."

"My daughter would like to have one of your carpets. She has heard that you make them very handsome. I'll leave the materials, and you can do the work when you come home. How long will you be away? "

"I store no materials," Luther retorted.

Eva watched this display with fascination, leaving the business entirely to her father. For a moment they all four stood stiffly in their places.

"I don't know you anyhow," Luther went on, working himself up.

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“That’s nothing against us. What are you so mad about?”

“He is not at all impressed by Father,” Mary thought; and now she was fascinated.

The thwarted gentleman delayed to answer because he could not at once think what he wanted to say. To express the vehemence of his feelings he needed something that would be a broadside. The right thing came to him in a moment. “You’re a puppy, sir. A puppy!”

Daniel started toward him promptly.

“Why! Don’t strike me!” Luther remonstrated; and the other halted, lowering his fist but looking threatening. Luther regarded him with astonishment, and then said, half courteously, “About the weaving I’ll see you again.”

Daniel glanced at Mary, and felt so sorry for her that he made no answer except, “Come, Eva.”

Luther turned his back on everybody in the world and departed from the room. Eva went and sat in the carriage. Her moment of amusement at the queer little scene was over, once more her mood was dark. With the idea of putting what had passed quite into the background, Daniel stayed a few minutes to talk to Mary and introduce himself. When he took leave, there in full view over the way was Louisa Fry. Both visitors persisted in not seeing her, and as soon as they had driven off she came hastening across the road.

Mary intercepted her, and they went round to the

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narrow porch tacked to the ell, the most secluded corner to be found. There they sat on the steps and began to talk in whispers.

“Is your father excitable this morning?”

“Yes.”

“Is he going?”

“He says so. Aunt Louisa, you saw who was here. Why didn’t they speak to you?”

“I’m not offended. I suppose Daniel doesn’t wish his family to know that he rides over here occasionally. Poor fellow, I believe that a supper at my house is the only vacation he ever gets. As for her, you may be sure she is not anxious to have her father come anywhere near me now. He might hear how she behaves at dances. I suppose they wanted carpet?”

Mary did not answer. She began to listen for sounds in the house. Everything was quiet, with the oppressive quiet of a sunny, hot morning.

“It seems so still,” she exclaimed. “I must see what has become of Father.”

She hurried through the empty rooms. In the garden Frogen was lying against the gate, looking as if he would burst into tears if he could. The woods had quietly received Luther with his pack and stick, escaping to his swamps by way of the Seven Stars and other such pleasant stopping-places.

“Why, what’s the matter, Mary, child?” Louisa asked.

“Father has gone without telling me.”

Mary sat down again on the steps. For many

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days and nights she had been facing things as they were. In the small occurrences of the last hour or two she had taken her necessary part, and now she began to feel what some of their results were likely to be; that knowledge came with a rush.

“I don’t think George will be happy,” was the one comment she made in her own mind. She pressed her hand slightly against her eye-lids.

Louisa, a solitary woman with no one in particular to be a recipient of her affection, made the most of her friends and put them into the places of the kin she had not.

“Mary,” she said, like a mother. “Mary, women get over it. You may be sure it’s true when I tell you — women get over it.”

CHAPTER XIV

THERE are three more days in this June. Yet why should I wish it to pass? I expect nothing in July," Eva thought.

Her calm look did not change, it remained fixed like the smile of a statue. She sat drooping, with a bowl of wild strawberries in her lap. She and Helen, settled on stools under the grape-arbor, were at work, and the little red fruit fell through their fingers as steadily as the tick of a clock; several tin kettles piled with berries, wonderfully red and sweet, waited to be hulled. In every breeze the grape-leaf shadows danced. It was still early in the morning, and quiet except for a joyful wren.

"These are solid. See how little waste," Eva said. "We shall have pounds of fine preserves with no expense except for the sugar."

"It took us five hours to pick them," Helen remarked. While her hands moved fast her attitude was that of a person in apprehension resting while she could.

"That is one of your ideas, to count our work as part of the expense. We should be busy at something anyhow."

"We should indeed." With her reddish braids and

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the soft, youthful oval of her cheek Helen's expression was too sombrely mature, the result of much pent-up thinking. "Father and all of us work from morning until night for enough to eat and a place to sleep; then we eat and sleep so that we can work again. We are like cats chasing our own tails; and I wonder what makes us keep on. I don't know who gets anything out of it."

"Not you and I. This isn't a home, it's a jail."

"Dear Eva! "

"I like work if there is any hope in it; but there is nothing ahead except scraping and pinching."

"I'm sure that what you want —."

"I'm done with wanting. Don't you know that you and I are here for good and all, and that we are going to drudge until we are all spoiled? Why were we born? "

"I have wondered that myself often enough. But you, so pretty —."

"That! It wasn't enough to keep him. I was so happy; you don't know how happy I was with him. Everything I desire in the world — and it's gone! " Even while she kept sternly on with the strawberries tears poured down Eva's cheeks. "Oh, I wish I could leave this place where he used to come! I can't forget him for one minute."

"Dearest, how could we do without you? I should like to kill that man."

"He is not to blame. Something kept him away. I don't know what, but something happened. I

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couldn't expect him to think of me when I was out of his sight, could I? Why, he can pick and choose; any girl would be overjoyed. If I had met him that day when I coaxed Father into taking me to Middleport, when I was so sure I should have good fortune! Now he has forgotten me."

"And yet she thinks of him. Well, I know nothing about love," Helen reflected.

There seemed to be no more to say. They went on with their work, and the wren twitched his tail and sang his little song over and over again.

"Helen," said Eva, after a while.

Although she spoke tranquilly she was concealing a great access of energy. To the sadness which had to be endured passively accrued the driving anxiety of a desperate purpose which she formed all of a sudden.

"It's my whole life. Why should I sit still and see it go wrong? "

Helen waited.

"Could you get through alone today? "

"Yes. Don't you think about the work. Where are you going? "

"It will be better if I don't tell you."

"Dear, you will not be reckless? "

"No. If I come meekly home again, at least I shall have done all I could to save myself."

"Wherever it is, I want you to go."

"Dear little soul! You are the best sister."

Eva flew upstairs. She found herself taking care to make no noise as she dressed, although her father

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and Sylvester were working three or four fields away. When she had escaped from the house she nearly ran into them, and hearing their voices she hid in a clump of sumach, her heart in her mouth. After that luck was with her. No sooner had she reached the road at the foot of the hill than an old man came along in a cart; he was going to Middleport, and he was willing to take her with him. At first she feared that he would question her, but he did not speak twenty words. For days and weeks she had not felt so at ease as she did then, driving silently along. She was on the way; and to compel her fate to declare itself was an inspiring idea, as good as happiness. Even the weather gave her hope — weather in which to take long chances with a light heart. The sky was as intensely blue as if fire had been mixed with it. No mist obscured the mountains; every peak and ridge stood out clear in the sunshine. With a good wind blowing from the northwest a succession of waves passed over the brilliantly colored grain-fields, and the leaves on the trees turned up their light green undersides. Where the road went through woodland the little pyrola in blossom made the air sweet; hundreds of orange-colored lilies bloomed in the fence-corners, and butterfly-weeds had burst into flame.

The time until they reached the Northkill bridge seemed short. She asked to be set down there, and the old man and the cart went slowly on. She stood a few minutes, looking at the red roofs of Middleport and at the road to Yost's, then across the expanse

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of Christiana's meadows, submerged in sunshine, traversed by the fragrant wind, arched by the sky. Haying was in progress; everybody was working hard. The mowing-machine moved along with a loud hum, guided by the foreman, whose gray beard covered his breast. Girls bent over their rakes; a number of men were trimming out the fence-corners with scythes, and others tossed bunches of hay from their pitch-forks to the wagons, which went off top-heavy, with much rattling, toward the mows. From somewhere near a willow-tree came a very clear, strong whistle.

Eva loitered only long enough to see the lay of the land; then with the thrill of starting a hard game for a high stake she started to walk across the fields and catch up with the foreman. When she called to him he did not look at her, being annoyed at having to stop.

"Here! Take that wagon over to that north corner," he shouted. "Well, what'll you have?"

"Can I get work here?"

"Work? It's late for you to start," he said, looking at her hard. "We don't need any more hands."

"I couldn't come earlier. If you want to get this big crop in before the storm you will need every hand you can hire."

"How do you know there will be a storm?"

"By the air, and the thunder-heads. You know it too. I saw how you are driving your people."

"The Bible speaks against hiring laborers at different hours of the day. It isn't fair to those who

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begin work at the regular time.”

“The Bible says the employer can do as he pleases with his own. I’ll take less money than the others though.”

“I never saw you before.”

“I’m a good worker.”

“Well, I’d hire you; but you must deal with the boss. You needn’t be afraid of him. Over there he sits, on the fence in the shade, and whistles. That’s the way he works; and so would I if I were in his place. He sees how everything is done, and thinks of better ways to do it, and he makes twice as much money as if he drove his own mowing-machine and did no thinking. See, there he comes, to find out why I am wasting my time.”

With a shout to his horses the foreman started off, but he kept looking back to see what would happen between the spectacular stranger, standing alone with the eyes of girls and men upon her, and George Stroh, who came leisurely across the field. He halted. His cheerful music stopped short.

“But he could whistle,” Eva thought; and she felt fiery.

At sight of Eva, George wanted to spring toward her. She was more than he had remembered; his dazed eyes delighted in her, he beheld her with such shame and joy that he failed to understand what she said.

“Will you employ me?” she repeated.

“You want to work here in the fields? Why, I

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couldn't let you work in the fields."

She gave him a look which defied him to recall anything. "Shall I come back with references?"

"Oh, that's unnecessary. Go with the rest."

He sauntered off, his face dark red. She did as she was told, imperturbably. At first the other girls were inclined to whisper among themselves; but they began to like her because she showed herself so companionable when one of them stumbled into a spring and when they encountered a snake. Hard as she worked, she did not feel it; she had little adventures with a meadow-lark's nest and a family of baby rabbits, and all the time her heart was beating, "Mine again, mine again! He saw me, and it was enough; I knew it would be. I can make him suffer. He is suffering now. No more whistling. How soon will he give in? How soon shall I forgive him? He may keep on being furious until noon, but then he will have to see me again, and sit at the same table."

When the noon bell rang and the haymakers began to stream out of the fields she held back, keeping with the other girls. On the way toward the house she viewed it attentively. It was larger and more imposing than she had expected.

As they all went in together she laid her hand lightly on the door-frame, with the thought, "I am entering his house for the first time. I had to make him angry today; but I will never hurt him again."

Composed as a kingfisher waiting on a branch, she stood in a corner all by herself and looked about her.

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Here was the other extreme from Mount Misery and its penury. The spacious kitchen at Yost's served the same purposes as a baron's hall. With the shutters bowed at all the windows it was cool and shady even on this hot day; every surface shone that could be made to shine, and the dresser glittered. Although Christiana's mother had acquired a stove when that was an advanced fashion, the fire-place had never been changed, and it proved that the family had lived well for generations, for a sheep could have been roasted in it easily. Four tables placed in a row made a long expanse of white linen, and women with full dishes kept coming from the summer-kitchen and going back in a placid procession. The lavish supply of food delighted Eva's soul.

"There is more variety here than we poor sinners at Mount Misery ever had at Christmas," she thought. "What a beautiful, beautiful household! Here they don't need to make one utensil do the work of three. I don't believe they would know how. All this he and his mother have; and they didn't earn it."

Christiana entered presently, with cool pink cheeks and a crisp lavender cotton gown. The foreman at once placed himself in attendance upon her. She surveyed the room and everyone in it pleasantly.

"That is his mother. How she carries herself!" Eva thought.

She was still gazing when Christiana caught sight of her across the room; the eyes of the two women met like the eyes of two champions facing each other with

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grounded spears. Eva reflected that she was much the younger, and courteously looked away first.

"George will come at any moment now," she thought.

"I like to work here," said a confidential voice behind her. "I come whenever they need extra help. They give us everything so full and plenty; and we have more freedom than at other places, because the bosses are not about at mealtime. They eat in the dining-room. Mrs. Stroh is wonderfully high-toned. Not a stitch on her that isn't bought in stylish stores."

"I can wait," Eva thought.

During the hilarious dinner she felt like a disguised princess about to dazzle the populace. She wondered what was going on in the dining-room, from which no voices could be heard, nothing except once or twice the opening and closing of the door. There was no conversation between Christiana and George. Both were deep in thought. His bright hopes that in the course of the three months his mother would be brought in some natural way to consent had ended when Eva took matters into her own hands and presented herself. Now he reflected that the two women, meeting in this way without his agency, might perhaps win each other; and he was waiting, but the hope was frail.

After the meal Christiana leaned back in her chair, observed him for a moment, and asked, "Did you bring Eva Hain here?"

"I did not."

"How does it happen that she is here?"

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“ She came and asked for work.”

“ She came to the fields herself? Indeed! When I saw this strange bird among our girls I suspected you, George. I was mistaken. Did you employ her? ”

“ I did not drive her off the place.”

Christiana too had had a hope, that George's feelings might prove superficial; but after going over the whole affair in her mind many times she had at last softened enough to say to herself that if he did not change in the three months she would reconsider. It mortified her to find how out of date that painful concession of hers was, at this stage, with the bold girl actually on hand; and she felt herself being hurried, by an inferior.

“ Well,” she said. “ Let her finish the day.”

“ Poor little thing, no doubt she needs the money.”

“ Now you see what she is.”

“ I do see what she is.” Mentally he added one adoring adjective after another. Although he uttered none of them, Christiana knew well enough what sort they were.

“ You gave me your word. Don't forget it,” she said.

“ Not likely. You were sure I had broken it, weren't you? ”

Although he hated her way of obtruding her hold upon him, he was sorry he had made that speech, she looked so hurt. He spoke with what tenderness he could.

“ Mother, all this is absurd between you and me.

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We are spoiling everything. I should not have made that promise. No, listen to me; don't treat me like this. You don't seem to care what kind of a life I have."

"So you think I don't care? "

"Then free me from that damned unmanly promise. Will you? "

"I will not."

"But you don't know Eva. Will you let me bring her to you? "

"No." She paused. "Dear does not begin to express what you are to me, George. I kept you from the fire when you were little, and I will keep you from this now."

"Very well, if that is your view of it. I won't break my word; but, mind you, it is for three months." He thought how it might be at the end of that time, when his home would perhaps be lost to him, for his mother might go so far, and when Eva would disdain him—how could she do otherwise if after deserting her he ignored her today? His face turned gray, but he proceeded steadily. "Then I shall expect your consent."

"I will never consent."

Christiana regarded him, and thought, "So men really suffer as much as that? He feels all that, and for a woman?" Suddenly she felt fear, so acute that she could scarcely keep it out of her face—fear of that beauty which was drawing him away, that ruthless force of nature. "Flesh of my flesh, there he stands.

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How far off is he from me? ” The pain she underwent was slow but nauseating, and it was in the most secret recesses of her heart. With baffled but indestructible devotion she touched him gently, and left him.

What became of him she did not know; and while she was in no doubt that the leash would hold she wanted to see that it was holding, so she went to the fields herself. When the stately woman in lavender came walking across the stubble, pitchforks and rakes moved faster; the gossiping group round the buckets, full of the harvesters' drink made of sugar, water and vinegar, dispersed to work; the little stir among the girls made Eva glance up. Back in the field again, she had kept a secret lookout, but there was no sign of George; and as the afternoon crawled by she had stopped saying to herself, “ How soon will he come? ” She worked stolidly along, and tried to think of nothing. With every quarter of an hour that passed she lost a little more hope. That those few minutes, which she used to repel him, had been her last sight of him, that she had played her high card and met outrageous luck — it was necessary for her to admit that to herself. Now it suited her to work lazily, and not to raise her eyes; but her tableau of indifference fell short, she would have had altogether as good opportunities to interest those at Yost's if she had stayed at home, for Christiana neither noticed nor avoided her.

Well satisfied at not seeing George anywhere, his

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mother stayed a while, inspected the hay and spoke to some of the girls. She observed that the air and the light were changing. The heat had grown intense; not a leaf moved; the pattering of the grasshoppers jumping about the stubble sounded loud. As clouds like white and dove-colored veils drew themselves delicately across the sky the sunlight became more and more dim, all the green hues in grass and trees turned dull, and the Blue Mountain looked leaden.

Christiana joined the foreman, who was surveying the prospect above him. "Trouble coming?" she asked.

"Look. I've been afraid of it ever since morning."

"Can they get in all the hay before the rain?"

"Hardly. The heat has tired them out."

"Try it. Tell them there will be extra pay for each one if they beat the storm."

"I will. Why couldn't this have waited? I never can resign myself to the fact that we farmers are so powerless over the weather."

"Don't waste time talking."

Christiana herself began to rake vigorously, and the foreman worked like two men, saying again and again, "You must get it in! You must!" All over the fields the pace quickened; not an unnecessary word passed. The loss of that hay was a calamity which everyone desired to avert, though it was not their hay. Dead tired, with garments clinging to their wet bodies, they raced with the weather; while the storm-clouds boiled up and the sky grew darker, they rushed load

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after load to the barns. The foreman became so exhilarated that he leaped like a boy on the tongue of an empty wagon and coasted down the slope from the mow. Eva, pale with the heat, sped furiously at her job.

Instead of coming straight on the storm curved westward in its course and gathered around Thunder Mountain, which turned the color of a purple plum. Then sheets of gray rain almost hid the peak, far-away roarings were followed by great crashes, and streaks of lightning flew across the sky. A few drops fell on the haymakers, no more. From the stormy quarter a wind rose, making the air fresh and acrid and shoving the clouds away. The laborers saw one blue patch and another above their heads.

"Hail! I smell it," said the foreman. "There will be no rain here. Well, well! The storm fooled us, and you must give them extra wages for nothing."

"They have done well, and they are ready to drop," Christiana answered. "Give them their money now, and let them have this half hour to rest before supper."

"I'll do that."

"How good the cold wind feels! Life-giving! "

The order to stop work was passed, and the wages were paid. The day being at an end, Eva went away, in her hand the silver which was all she would get. While the haymakers lingered at supper the storm entirely disappeared; the sky, swept of clouds, was a pale, clear blue above the silvery tan stubble-fields, and swallows began to dip and fly over the creek.

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Later a little crowd of men and girls came leisurely to take in the hay that had been left. These people were permanently employed at Yost's, so the talk was intimate, with teasing, coquetry and plans for Sunday. The foreman shook his head and said, "Ei, ei, ei!" over the richness of the crop; the two shepherd-dogs who had accompanied their friends looked on benignly. They all went home rejoicing, following the last load, with the dogs at the head of the procession and the west bright gold and rosy.

The fields were left alone; as it grew darker they began to look pallid, and along the fences the elderberry blossoms were white as frost-flowers. Under the trees near the house the girls sat resting and singing songs generations old.

Someone came silently out from among the willows and began to walk, up one way and down another, around and about, moving as if driven by a wind. In her wanderings she came to a very old willow with branches that drooped almost to the ground; and she went back and forth near it for a while, circled it, and stopped. George was lying there, with one arm across his face. While she stood transfixed, looking down at him, he uncovered his eyes and regarded her.

"Are you here?" she said, sadly.

She sat down under the tree, and he moved nearer to her.

"What happened?" she asked.

"I thought you would have nothing more to do with me."

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“ Why did you leave me? ”

“ It's not my fault, I swear, Eva.”

“ Whose fault then? ”

“ My mother got a promise out of me,” he answered, with shame.

“ Why, he hasn't grown up! ” Eva thought. Quite tenderly she said, “ You have not broken any promise. This was my doing. So your mother doesn't like me? ”

“ She doesn't know you.”

“ Goodbye.”

“ Oh, don't! ”

“ What else can I do? ”

“ My mother has something in her which subdues everyone. Even when she appears to agree with me she seems to get behind my will and pry it loose. I know I was a cowardly fool to make that promise.”

“ And what about me? ”

He said nothing.

“ George,” she asked, presently. “ Have you forgotten those evenings on the hill? We met again and again; only to be together made us happy; and did we promise each other nothing by that? Was all our happiness and confidence less than a few common words? Then it was no more than a pastime to you. It bound me faster than all the words in the world.”

She spoke wistfully. He raised himself up; he had dreaded several things, but he began to hope once more. It seemed that even to be cut off from home would not be hard if he were sure of her. He wanted to look and look at her, but she had turned her face away,

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and there were tears on it.

“ Oh, I should not let you see me like this,” she faltered.

Lose her he could not. In his anxiety he spoke baldly: “ I promised only for three months. Then I’m coming to Mount Misery for you. What do we care for the consequences? ”

After one minute, in which she comprehended this, Eva rose and without a word set out across the field. He ran after her.

“ Eva, the day the three months are up I’ll be there, begging you to marry me.”

“ Don’t dare to come to Mount Misery.”

“ What? ”

“ You thought you could drop me for three months because of her whim, and after that pick me up again. Not me! ”

“ Is there somebody else? ”

“ Oh, very likely. I hope your promise-keeping will be paid well. Yost’s is a nice place.”

For some seconds he was as incandescent as she. Then suddenly he became quite self-possessed; he stood before her in one of his courtly attitudes.

“ Eva, do you remember what I told you about the red-haired woman? There was one thing I did not tell you. When I was sixteen I resolved not to ask what I am asking now until I found a girl who could outshine her. I have been waiting for you a long time.”

“ Your promise: what about it? ”

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“ Will you? ”

She drew her hand across her eyes, feeling humble and a little sick, feeling also that they should not rush through this moment of great dignity

“ I’m nothing, and I have nothing of my own to offer you; but won’t you, dearest? ”

“ George, it’s you I want. It’s you.”

CHAPTER XV

THE whippoorwill was calling, with a sound like rending silk, when Eva walked back slowly with George across the fields. To tell his mother and have it over was what he now wanted: he was so happy that anything unpropitious seemed impossible; and Eva was ready. As they came near the house, a long beam of light from the north window shone between the trees, and they saw Christiana's ruddy face illuminated by the lamp. A ledger, account-books and a wealthy wallet were spread out on her black walnut secretary; she was evidently making calculations fast and setting down nothing but the results.

When the door opened she glanced up, and there stood the two together. They were a vivid pair, able to carry everything before them.

"This is Eva, Mother."

George announced it with great elation and a good deal of manner. At this moment his mother had no hold on him.

"How do you do?" Christiana said, politely. "Daniel Hain's daughter, aren't you?" she added, to soften it, because the objectionable girl looked so frightened.

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Eva would have liked to respond, and to step forward, but she did not dare. "Oh, I will forget that cruel promise!" she thought, and waited, trembling.

It seemed to George impossible that with the lovely, timid girl there before her his mother would not be reasonable and joyfully accept what was offered.

"Mother, it's your daughter."

"Are you married?" Christiana inquired, watching him, with her head on one side.

"Not yet. In a month."

"My son!" Christiana said to herself. She grasped the facts slowly, being in great pain. "He gave me his word, and he has broken it. And for this common girl! His strongest motives are sensual." Not to let her inferior perceive her dismay was the one faint satisfaction she could still have. She forced herself to hold out her hand.

"This is quite a surprise," she said.

As Eva shook hands she bit the inside of her own lip to keep it steady. She was dumb; there seemed to be nothing to say. Christiana at the same time was foreseeing how it would be with George as he grew older, how he would shrink into himself, away from this woman's unkindness; and she, his mother, who would protect him from anything, would then be dead.

After explaining more than once that now he would take Eva home George conducted her out of the room. They had not been in it five minutes.

"Mother is always quiet," he said.

"I see."

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"When she knows Eva she will be reconciled," he thought. "Then it may go very well." Christiana's tones had been placid, in her face none of the formidableness he remembered; and such a superficial little conversation might mean anything, it might even mean what he so much desired.

He drove away with Eva, choosing a long and roundabout way. The horses trotted through the little valleys. The two did not say much; they looked vaguely into the sweet darkness, and it seemed that there was no time beyond that hour, and they the only human beings in the world.

When the wheels began to jar over the rough hill road, Mount Misery could no longer be avoided. As Eva was stepping out of the carriage a figure separated itself from the shadows of the porch and came forward.

"That's my father waiting for me," she whispered, with a sort of contemptuous fear.

"We'll tell him."

"It will save trouble."

Daniel said, "I thought so. Eva, go in."

"Eva has promised to marry me in a month," George informed him. "I will take the best care of her. We can talk business another time."

"Um-hm," said Daniel, not dazzled at all.

After waiting a while George said, patiently, "Please give me some answer."

"How did you become acquainted with him, Eva?"

As she would so soon be free from her father's jurisdiction she was not afraid to tell the facts, some

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of which were already well enough known to him. She told them freely, and by the time she had finished with the details she was quite gay.

“So you have been deceiving me?” was Daniel’s comment. He addressed George: “You say you will take good care of her. Did you take care of her on Battalion Day, when you set the whole crowd against her? And since?”

When she heard that, Eva disregarded George, who had begun to answer angrily; she walked abruptly away from both and stood alone.

“I have been dutiful long enough,” she said, with intense bitterness. “There has been no harm in anything I did; but you will not think that because you have made up your mind that I am bad. You only want me at home for the work I do. I had to deceive you to get away, even for a few hours, from my hateful life here.”

It went against the grain for Daniel to justify himself at any time; but he said, “Eva, you know that I have been obliged to depend on you since your mother died. You know.”

He stopped. Crop-failure, debts not his own, death which brought not only grief but money-loss — he could not speak of them. George partly understood him.

“Yes, poor mother! She would be glad that I am getting away. We asked your consent, and you said a cruel thing about me and ordered me into the house. I wish I hadn’t told you. Oh!” she cried. “Where

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shall I go? First George's mother and then my own father."

Avoiding both men as if she had a horror of them, she fled sobbing to the porch. They did their best to soothe her, but she kept away from them and wept despairingly.

"You had better go," Daniel said. "She can't quiet down while you are here."

"I can't leave her like this. Eva, don't, don't!"

"Eva, hush! Do you want to frighten Helen?"

That made her respond. Pressing her hand to her mouth and shivering, she walked into the house. The men listened anxiously for some minutes, and then said a civil goodnight.

When he was alone Daniel went and sat down again in his corner. If he had had somebody to tell him that he had not done harm it would have been a comfort, but he must get along without that, and do what a man should. He felt as if he were walking along a muddy road through lifeless country on a gray day.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE first of August early in the morning it was hot, and so murky that the sun looked colorless. At Yost's the work inside and out went on as usual. There were no elegant preparations for company, no joyful excitement. Nothing indicated that this was a wedding-day. When George came downstairs he found one room after another in perfect order, empty and carefully darkened to keep out the heat. His mother was not to be seen; she had gone off on some errand, and no one could tell him anything about her.

While waiting for her he ate a lonely breakfast and wandered about, looking hopefully for some signs of the occasion; but wedding-cake there was none, or anything like it, and no beginning of anything. After a while he went to the garden himself, and brought in all the flowers there were, and did what he could with the poppies and lady's-slippers and spiky red bergamot.

"If Mary were here she would see to all this; she knows how to arrange flowers. These don't look well," he thought, as he cautiously stuck them into some tall celery-glasses which he had hunted up. Among his fresh embarrassments one pressing question

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which had worried him for weeks recurred to him: "What on earth can I say to Eva to explain why I am so short of money on our wedding-trip?"

He opened the rooms and made them look as gay as he could; then he searched high and low for his mother and could not find her. It was quite time for the bridegroom to start. He had begun to tramp nervously up and down the sitting-room, in despair of the whole celebration, when in Christiana walked. She wore a cotton morning dress, and looked overheated but not at all guilty; and she gazed at the flowers on her secretary as if they were a symptom.

"Mother! There's nothing ready anywhere!"

"Are you going?"

She put the question as if she opened a door for the last time; but her manner made no impression on him. He thought how she had kept him weeks and weeks in uncertainty, all the while not opening her lips about his marriage. Indeed she had had very little to say to him on any subject; and now, at the last minute, she still hoped to influence him!

"I consulted you about everything," he replied, warmly. "I said my plans were to take Eva to the minister's house and bring her here to dinner, and go to Philadelphia this afternoon; and I gave you a list of the people I thought we should invite, and told you who was coming. If you didn't want them why didn't you object when I asked you? How could she have any wedding in that poor little place of hers?"

"This is your affair," she answered. "These

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guests are yours, not mine. You can give orders for their entertainment, as if this house were a hotel."

"It is not my place to give orders when guests are to be entertained in this house. Nor is it my place to look about and see whether the proper things are being done or not."

As Christiana turned from him with a bored air and opened an account-book, it seemed to him that his mother was far away, and he missed her dreadfully. Standing where he did he could not see the longing look she cast at the small central closet in the secretary where she kept her cash. When he was about to start on a journey she had always unlocked that door and given him a roll of money. It distressed her to know how little he had now.

"Will you see that these people are made welcome and have their dinner?"

"Yes."

"Mother, shall I bring my wife here to live?"

"You may. I told you that before," replied Christiana, sharply. "I can't send him away. That I can't do. I must keep him where I can see him and hear him speak," she said to herself. "Will he really go? Can it be that he will go?"

"Goodbye," he said, and went out.

He did not think of his mother again, her chilling non-refusals and his anxieties caused by her. He turned away from all that. What was about to happen filled his thoughts; the mental picture of Eva which he dwelt upon was radiant. Only the evening before

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she had said, "I look at my ring, and I can't believe that it is mine. I am so happy." He wished that his father could have married them. It seemed strange that to the rest of the world this hour was like any other hour.

Toward noon the rockaway from Mount Misery was drawing near Yost's, and Helen had not caught a glimpse of the bridal carriage anywhere along the way. Daniel and Sylvester did not look about much. They had expected to be impressed, and they were more impressed than they expected. By the time they arrived it was quite painful. Among the shining vehicles of the other guests the rockaway was a discreditable possession; and when he had been sitting for ten minutes in Christiana's parlor Daniel had to remind himself that he too was a proprietor, and that he had many more years to live than these elderly fellows whose money was all made.

It was an unpleasant occasion. Christiana's dark red room was full of velvet chairs and thick silk cushions, very warm, and somewhat musty with the dampness of summer. Not a person there really approved of the marriage, and the atmosphere was that of dissent and disinclination to be pleased. Luther, who had cut his wanderings short in order to go to this wedding, kept far away from Daniel and looked ready to throw stinging darts. Sitting stiff and lonesome, Joe, the sole representative of the Seven Stars crowd, wished heartily that he had not taken all the trouble to come, until he began to wish that some

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one would introduce him to Helen, which Louisa did. The other guests were few and dignified. The portly men wore handsome cloth, the women silk with wide flounces. While waiting for the bride and groom they talked, tried to be interested in stereopticon views, sat with photograph albums in their laps; and as it grew later and very much warmer they fidgeted and endeavored not to show that they were hungry. They did not approve of Louisa because, although she had inherited plenty to live on, she chose to run her father's hotel. She alone behaved as if she were at a wedding; and they thought she acted like a tavern-keeper, talking to everybody and making jokes, and suggesting reasons why the bride and groom were tardy. She was really the hostess, for Christiana had not appeared at all.

“Will these people receive my daughter kindly?” Daniel thought. “If only she doesn't get angry!”

Louisa was particularly cordial to him; but she was his sole friend there, and he felt so troubled that it became a burden to speak to anyone. At last the aimless conversation could be endured no longer: he felt that he must make an effort to protect his girl. When he left the room no one noticed it. Out in the hall between two rows of doors he did not know which way to go, and he stood still, reflecting that Eva would have her home in this immense house. From now on Mount Misery would do without her, and she would move about these rooms every day. Slowly he proceeded toward one door, which was open a little. It

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led into the dining-room; and he saw the table, long and white, and Mary with a green apron over her white gown. The encounter was startling when both were deep in their own thoughts. He said nothing; though she felt irritated she bade him a pleasant good-morning, and mentioned "Aunt Louisa."

"I didn't know she had a niece," he remarked.

"She has not. My mother taught me to call her and Mrs. Stroh 'Aunt.' "

"This young lady would like me to forget her father's silly behavior," Daniel reflected.

As he still did not disclose what he wanted, Mary asked, "Does the table look pretty? "

"Yes," he replied, soberly. He really considered it awe-inspiringly elegant, and dreaded sitting at it.

"Well, let him stand there if he likes," she said to herself; and she went back to her work and her interrupted thinking as if there were no one in the room. This was George's wedding-day; he was putting a gold ring with engraved initials on Eva's hand. "Oh, if the next few hours were over! Well, they will be soon."

"Can you tell me where Mrs. Stroh is? " Daniel at last inquired.

"I'll see." Mary left the room, came back in a moment, and said, "Go upstairs; you will find her. The bride and groom are taking a long time, aren't they? "

"They are very late."

In the shady upper hall Daniel again stood between

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two rows of closed doors, and some minutes passed before one of them was quietly opened. Christiana had been sitting in her own room, sore and passive. It seemed that when she went downstairs and met the wedding guests she would accept this fatality; then there would always be another woman, a young woman whom she detested, here in her own house. The summons to see Daniel was a sign that she could no longer choose her own visitors; as she walked slowly toward him she looked weak.

“I believe she is just,” he thought. “She thinks I am going to beg.”

He had meant to talk only of Eva, but now he had the wish to explain himself.

“I want to speak to you. I like this marriage no more than you do.”

“Why not?”

“Do you think I want my daughter to go into a family where they are not proud to have her?”

“Why didn’t you prevent it?”

“I couldn’t. Why didn’t you?”

While Christiana had nothing to say to that, she regarded him without anger because he was so in earnest.

“There is another thing,” he said. “I won’t praise Eva. I only say that it will go well if she thinks you like her. She will do anything for those she likes.”

“Whom does she like?”

“She loves her sister. She is nervous at times, but it never lasts long.”

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"We shall all have to do our best," Christiana answered; and with nothing more to say they walked through the hall and down the stairs side by side.

It had grown hotter and hotter in the parlor among the heavy upholsteries, and the guests were sleepy and bored. A dozen times they had thought they heard George's carriage. When Christiana entered, it made a little time pass, but there soon came a relapse. Hungry men roamed out and in, and looked frequently at their watches. The women whispered behind their fans that the couple must have met with a serious accident, unless the minister had gone away to a dying person; and there were lips which breathed that perhaps some one had been jilted at the last minute. Luther stared gloomily from one to another, as if all this had developed through disregard of his repeated warnings; Christiana showed excitement only in the tension of her neck-muscles and the elusive movements of her eyes.

Finally Sylvester, who had been sitting statue-like, rose to his feet, and said, "I am going to drive along the road and find out what I can."

"I'll go with you," Daniel responded, quickly. Standing apart from all the others, they took leave of Christiana and went out.

After another wait Sylvester reappeared by himself. He halted stiffly in the doorway, and turned very red as the whole assemblage fixed their eyes on him.

"The bridal couple left on the morning train," he said.

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“ Left! ”

“ Yes. We met a man who saw them.”

The guests looked at each other with excitement, and some told frankly what they thought. Luther kept back everything he might have said, although the effort made him contort his face. Louisa inquired where Daniel was.

“ He wanted to walk home,” answered Sylvester, who was intensely mortified. “ He told me to bring my sister Helen back immediately.”

“ My son’s wife persuaded him to insult me because this was not enough of a celebration for her; and I suppose he was easy to persuade. I suppose he hates me,” Christiana thought.

She said, “ Will you walk out to dinner? ” as if the feast were exactly on time; and the remaining guests streamed into the dining-room, to the table where there were so many seats vacant.

CHAPTER XVII

“**Y**OU don’t hear a ripple; the creek is as smooth as jade. The duckwort buds might be balls of gold, and there sits a dragon-fly on one of them. Isn’t that a pretty picture?”

Talking a great deal to an imaginary companion, Luther lay in bed with his eyes closed. There he had lain for a month or more. His red cheeks had become thin and sallow; his flexible body was crippled, the vagabond was tied. In December Mary had begun to suspect that it hurt him to sit at the loom, and she had used strategy to enable the doctor to see him. Now it was near the end of May. A catbird sang all day in the garden, and the Blue Mountain beyond the north window was covered with new foliage, already thick and murmurous.

“I haven’t seen a spring like this since I was a boy. Isn’t it fine? See the speckled red lilies all over that meadow. I feel the sun on my back through my shirt.”

Mary moved about very quietly, hoping that he would not notice her; but her fresh cotton dress rustled, and he opened his eyes.

“Go away! Get away!” he screamed, and kept on screaming until his breath gave out.

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“Wouldn’t you like to have your breakfast?” Mary suggested.

That mild response puzzled him, and he stopped pounding the bed with his fist. Then he encouraged her by a broad smile; and when she had come near enough he caught her arm and pinched it hard.

“Now you don’t want to hurt me.”

“No-o-oh! ”

As he expressed no objection to breakfast she started to bring it; but his furious cries and shouts of “Police! Police!” made her come back running.

“Where were you going? You were going to meet that loafer. Listen.” He loudly addressed Louisa, who walked in at that moment. “I want to tell you about this girl. You would believe that butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth; but there is a fellow coming to this house, loafing around every day, all the time. What do you think of that? Isn’t that a disgrace? And she neglects me shamefully. No doctor because it would cost a little something; and she pours my medicine out of the window, and almost starves me as I lie here. She doesn’t care.”

He made a weak dive to get at Mary. Louisa exclaimed, “Go out of the room! Quick!” Luther liked her vigorous soothings; and in a few minutes he lay quiet in the bed, only muttering, “That woman! That woman! Hell is too good for that woman!”

To divert him, Louisa whispered, “Have you said your prayers?”

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"No, I haven't. Don't you know who I am? I am the village infidel."

"Then let's do it. Fold your hands like this, and close your eyes. 'Our Father!'"

"Our Father! Yes, but He doesn't come."

Nothing more would Luther say. He grew drowsy, and lay so still that Louisa was able to put the room in order before she sat down beside him. Often as she had witnessed these delirious scenes, each one distressed her afresh; and she knew well that the time, even for this ugly view of him, was growing short. One of the very few whom she cared for and trusted was slipping away from her.

"Poor Mary! Poor girl!" she thought. "This suffering, unhappy creature who wants to torment everyone, even his own daughter, and who will probably die cursing, is not Luther; Luther died weeks ago, and he had a good death."

A little later she became aware of his eyes upon her; the crazy malice was gone out of them, and his face had lost the sour look of suspicion. He began to speak, and though it was not much more than a whisper the voice was his. She almost stopped breathing to listen. It seemed that her old friend had resurrected himself for a few minutes, just for her.

"Lou! I am going to leave you. Don't do that. I don't like tears." He spoke as snappishly as if he were in perfect health. "Do you expect me to be a parlor ornament for centuries? No. Oh, when I get out of this body I am going to kick it! I want you

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to take my tools and my old clothes and all my belongings that are of no value, and make a bonfire when Mary is out of the way."

"I will do as you say. Luther, wouldn't you like to see the minister?"

"Now what do you ask me that for? Since Paul Stroh died I have never wanted to see a minister. No. My time is up; and I feel a great curiosity. What a woman Christiana is! I wish she wouldn't sit alone over there in the evening."

"What are your wishes about Mary?"

"My Mary! I want her to have good times. So faithful and patient! She takes after her mother. Keep near to her, will you?"

"Indeed I will. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"I'd like to lie with my face to the east. Will you see to it?"

"Yes. Oh, Luther, we have been friends so long!"

"Lou, it is spring!"

"If Mary were only here now, while he is like this!" Louisa thought. But by the time Mary returned he was swearing as hard as he could.

The doctor came and went, and after his visit the day entered its second phase for everyone in the house. The patient fell sound asleep; Louisa seized the opportunity to look after affairs at the Crossed Keys. With the doors open so that she could hear her father if he stirred, Mary settled herself at her quilting-frame, and Frogen walked round and round her, wagging his

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plumy tail, and laid himself down close to her side.

“ Dear Father! ” she thought. “ What am I to do when he is gone? ” His death would not uproot her, and for him it would be a blessing, but she could not comfort herself with that.

Listening for his breathing, she threaded a needle and set to work. The beautiful coverlet she was making had festoons of roses on it, and a flock of birds flying, done in stitches as even and fine as seed pearls. It was not more than half finished; much had already been sewn into the feathery birds and complicated garlands, for she had been at it all winter. In the cold, short afternoons she had stitched and kept the fire going, with Frogen for company. It had been hard to tell one week from another. Those months and their few happenings were in her mind now, not definitely, but helping to make up her mood. The grief she anticipated could not be suffered by itself, as it is in the nature of some griefs to bring others with them, back from the past, to be confronted again.

Her life had narrowed down. Occasionally, when Luther was away, Daniel had come to call on a Sunday afternoon. She found his presence pleasant enough; sometimes she sang for him; once in a long while he spoke of progress at Mount Misery. When it could not be avoided gracefully she had gone to Yost's. Christiana was hardly ever seen in Middleport, and since George's marriage Mary had not had a real conversation with him. He appeared to be somehow dimmed.

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"If I could be sure that he is happy," she thought, as she delicately completed the centre of a rose.

Whenever Eva had paid her a visit, to lounge away an hour in an intimacy without friendship, she had required to see the quilting, admiring it immensely and intimating that it was a waste of time. She had also begged for singing-lessons, although she possessed no voice and no ear. Opening her mouth wide, not caring how she looked, she sang with her whole face, A-a-ahs which went through Mary, they were so sharp and weak; and she produced louder sounds valiantly, rising on her toes. Even after she herself knew that it was hopeless she had kept on with the lessons for a while. The fire-flash between her brows was often deep crimson; the loose, elaborate arrangement of her hair made her thin cheeks and temples look thinner.

"Poor, frightened thing! I wish I could put her absurd remarks out of my mind. And she is so well guarded, with her husband and her father. Stop that! I will not envy her," Mary said to herself.

"Can't you give a little time to cheer me up?" had been Eva's demand over and over. "They're so cranky at Yost's. The same thing at the same time each day, until I feel as if I were in a machine. Mount Misery was livelier. And the fuss my mother-in-law makes about her things! She shows me this and that, old linen and china and such stuff; and this belonged to her mother, and that came down on her grandfather's side, and you hardly dare touch it, and it must all be taken care of and pretty nearly

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prayed to. I get sick and tired."

"I want to forget all of this," Mary thought, from the depths of her exhausted soul. "I want to go back to my old thoughts."

In spite of this subtle form of homesickness she did not stop sewing; the streaming tail-feathers of a bird went on growing steadily until Frogen started up, and she heard a cautious knock. Very quietly she went to the side door. Daniel Hain made his appearance around the corner of the house, bringing a basket of early vegetables, which he had arranged nicely, with an eye to the crimson and green and white.

"Come into the fresh air," he said.

She stepped out on the side porch. It was so little as to be no more than a broad border along the ell, and it overlooked the garden, strewn with cornflowers as if a whole Milky Way of blue stars had lightly fallen. Intending to leave her father only a few minutes, Mary did not even ask the visitor to sit down. As he made inquiries he regarded her anxiously. The unclouded look which he associated with her face was gone, and there were broad, dark shadows under her eyes and a purplish tinge on her lips.

"Father is asleep," she said. "He is not suffering much today."

"That's good. Do you know how Eva is?"

"Well, I think. She was here on Tuesday. Won't you ever go to Yost's to see her?"

"Some time."

Daniel seemed satisfied to stand there, gazing

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keenly toward a far-off point on the mountain. While he appeared as hard-working as ever, the goaded expression had vanished, and he carried himself with peculiar dignity; it was the captain-like bearing common to men who in carrying on their business coöperate successfully with the weather.

"He looks quite fine and proud," Mary thought. Making a great effort to put aside her troubles and to be interested in him, she asked, "Have you had good luck? "

"When you are not so tired I'll tell you about it."

"No, tell me now."

"Well, this is a great year. Of course it's early to count on anything —."

She tapped the wooden porch-railing three times and uttered a magic word on his behalf. There were many in Middleport who believed that bad spirits would come rushing to break anybody's good luck if their attention were called to it, and this was the way to scare them off.

"That's right. We'll take no chances," he said. "The wheat and the rye and the oats and the grass! They are beyond anything I have ever seen. I expect to have some improvements, those the place needs most, well started before winter."

"I'm so glad."

"It's too early to be sure," he repeated; but he was beaming. He had almost reached a point of great happiness, that of the enterprising nature which, after half starving for a long time on plans and ideas, finds

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itself free to act, to achieve, and get the respect of its peers.

The air of the morning was full of hope; soft as silk, fragrant with the first roses, the sweet wind went passing by. A sense of the contrast between the position of this man with his sane and solid ambitions and that of her father, a prostrate human being debarred from the whole summer just ahead, made her lips quiver.

“What is it, Mary?” For the first time Daniel called her that.

“My father cannot get well. Oh, I miss him awfully!”

“And I have been telling her about my business, and bragging!” Daniel thought.

Regretful though he was, he felt a great thrill because she had let him witness her grief. He thought her the finest little lady he had ever seen; and with all her spirit she was slight and solitary. His feelings almost nullified the years between them.

“Dear,” he said, moving eagerly a step toward her. “Maybe I ought to wait until my place is as I mean to have it; but if I do, some other man will have the chance to carry you off —.”

She turned her face away, but he saw her repulsion, and did not know how to go on. “What will she say?” he thought, in great anxiety.

“Please don’t.”

He stopped short; he felt how scarred he was by work, how far from young.

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“ I might have known; I did know,” he said, uncertainly. “ You can’t think of this now. I meant not to speak for a long time if I ever did; but I want you so much. Perhaps if I’m patient — .”

“ I can’t. I am very sorry.”

After one grave look at her he walked away, and closed the gate, and she heard his horse go down the road.

As she went hurrying to her father her head for once was not held high. Never to see Daniel Hain again was her fervent wish, now that she knew what he wanted. As he himself suspected, he had only made one more difficulty for her to breast. She tried to remember whether he had said anything that sounded as if he might come back. Luther had not wakened, so there was time to sit dolefully down on the green settee, and presently she curled herself up on it, and lay still, thinking.

Her conclusion was, “ Yes, he’s kind. I wish he hadn’t seen me shrink away from him. He is rather old. How could he have thought of any such thing? Ah! There is nothing I must decide or do at once.”

The house was cool and silent. Now and then a breeze from the mountain wandered through, and a wood-peewee’s gentle voice was heard from some tree. Mary had no idea that she could fall asleep; but it was a great relief to have Daniel gone, and she had not had a good night’s rest for a week. She did not move again. Louisa came in and quickly went out on tiptoe, delighted to find them both so comfortable.

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About the middle of the afternoon, when the sunshine appeared inert and the silence was profound, Luther began to talk again once more to his imaginary companion.

“ Pretty late for prayers, I think; but I’m not an infidel. I only said that so that people would let me alone. Poor souls! They don’t even see that it is beautiful, this unassuming country hereabout. I want to come back here; if I have any chance I’ll walk, off and on, till Judgment Day. At times when I have been away somewhere among the meadows after nightfall I have felt such freedom. I have felt close to a divine being who does not want us to go hungry and who takes us to her benign breast at last. That’s what I’ve worshipped. I never told anybody about it before. What do we know? ”

Having said it all, all he had to say, in a faint, resolute voice, he closed his eyes with great satisfaction. Nothing disturbed the quiet which soothed Mary in her dreams. One hour and another ebbed away. It was wonderfully peaceful. When at last she woke she saw sunset light, and with a frightened sound she sprang up and darted to the bedside.

She felt like shrieking, but did not. She ran out, and there was George driving by.

“ Oh, come! I fell asleep, and I’m afraid Father’s gone.”

George ran back with her, and comforted her like a brother. In the sorrowful confusion he attended to everything, fetched the doctor, summoned those who

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were needed. Although anxious to get home he sent word to Yost's instead, and arranged to stay with Luther, and said there was no need of another watcher. By persuading Mary in her dazed unreasonableness that she had better go at once to Louisa's house for the night, he kept her from seeing the dreary-looking wagon which arrived, and the old woman in black like a crow.

Louisa herself went sorrowfully about putting everything in order, with a dust-pan and broom or with fresh linen over her arm. When all had been done George closed the house, which seemed wonderfully empty and clean, like a shell. It was late enough for him to begin his long night-watch. This was not the first time he had sat up with the dead, and he did not dislike the prospect of the hours alone. He was a good deal shocked by the fact that Luther had died. Before settling down he walked about a while, and wondered whether Mary would try living here by herself, so close to the mountain that it seemed that the tossing and sighing of great branches was really inside the house. The piano, long untouched, looked cold. From the shadows at the top of the stairs came an occasional creak. He carried a large chair into the hallway, inspected the luncheon which Louisa had set out for him, and chose a couple of Luther's books. Frogen, much puzzled, lay down by his master's closed door.

George's reading went badly, for he could not keep his mind on it. He looked unusually hearty, but as

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he sat and reflected, deep lines came out on his face. Nothing, no matter how solemn, could take his thoughts for any great length of time from his own cares. He was worried night and day.

“Where can I get the money? My salary used to be a joke between Mother and me, but it’s a poor joke now to leave me short with all these expenses coming. Mother knows how things are. I don’t see how she can keep so still and be so bitter. I suppose when the boy is here she will want him to have things. She will not be able to hold her grudge then. She was never close. I wish from my soul that Eva were through it. Why must it be so hard on the woman? Suppose she shouldn’t live? I won’t think of that at all. No doubt every man feels a little excited the first time. I want to see that boy. How long will it be until I can have fun with him, I wonder? I’ll read a while.”

The whirr of the clock before it struck, woke him out of a doze, and he sat up, rubbing his eyes, and counted the strokes which seemed to make the whole house ring.

“On the other side of that door Luther lies dead. Yes, I’m coming. I beg your pardon for falling asleep.”

The loom with a piece of light-colored weaving on it, and the arrangement of white linen smoothly draped and sweeping down to the floor, were the first objects under the light of the lamp in George’s hand. As he turned back the sheet Luther’s face, with an earnest

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expression full of dignity, appeared in the vague circle of the light. When his heart quietly stopped it had not troubled him.

"He looks as if he were pleading a case," George thought. "No doubt he was handsome when he was young. A fastidious fellow too. What an immense disappointment he must have been to himself! Studied law, too lazy to practice; drank a little and a little more; called himself an infidel. I wonder what he believes now.

"Frogen, what are you growling at? Heavens, keep quiet! Who on earth — ?"

He heard a laborious step, and went to the door, Frogen dashing ahead.

"Eva!"

"I came to watch with you," she said, looking at him like a wicked fairy. "Let me see the old man."

Her face poised above Luther's face in the dim light. Her husband knew what she was thinking: "He is gone. I am still here; but for how long?"

"Dear —."

"What do you want?" she gently asked Luther.

"She feels how he is yearning for something," George thought. He said, "The old man is at peace."

"I only know that he is not here. Where is he? Oh, where is he?"

Presently her brooding mood vanished; there came a complete change in her tone.

"I want to go," she said, and walked across the hall, restlessly.

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"Eva, what brings you here?"

"I took the phaeton and Kitty. Oh, I didn't make anybody any trouble! I harnessed her myself."

"But why did you want to come?"

"I'll tell you. It's so close here."

She would not sit in his comfortable chair; and he stood looking at her in alarm, while she wandered around, preoccupied as if thinking up a whim about which to be stubborn. She fingered Mary's belongings, inspected the luncheon, and ate a bite or two, disdainfully. At last, after another aimless march, she stopped in front of him.

"Come."

"We must stay here until morning, dear."

"I won't let you stay in this house. I won't have it."

"Eva, you know I can't leave now, not even long enough to drive you home."

"I don't want to go to Yost's."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Home."

"Do you mean to Mount Misery?"

She nodded.

"What does all this mean?"

A brief glance replied. Her eyes were both fierce and forlorn. She trusted him, but hers was the strange kind of trust which half wills to repulse and wound, and yet cries, "Oh, help me!"

"You kept it to yourself, and drove over here alone?"

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“I wouldn’t tell anyone but you. I wouldn’t ask anything of them at Yost’s. I haven’t a friend among them. Oh, take me away, dear! Nothing can hurt that dead old man.”

Moving very quietly, George locked the shutters, cast a hasty glance at Luther, and blew out the lamp. Frogen would not leave the house until he was dragged out; he planted himself in the doorway as close against the door as he could, and when they drove off they heard him whining until they were far down the street.

Beyond the village the air smelt of chestnut-blossom and rang with peepers’ voices calling “Knee-deep! Knee-deep!” Gold-gray was the color of the fields flooded with the full moon’s light, and the rich foliage adorning the roadside with fantastic masses and many-pointed, elaborate silhouettes appeared cloudy white and velvet black. The pale stone walls of Yost’s Church were almost lucent as they drew near it.

“Stop, please, George,” she said, eagerly. “We’ll go into the church.”

“Dear, for Heaven’s sake let me take you home as quickly as possible.”

“If you don’t stop I will jump out. Now unlock the door. Here is your key.”

After the fresh air of the spring night they felt a stagnant atmosphere against their faces. The empty church confronted them, dead still, full of massive shadows which were like the dregs of darkness. Moonbeams made tracts of silver light on the panelling and the floor.

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"Now take me into your pew," said Eva.

"I am afraid you will walk against something and be hurt."

He struck a match, and saw her face by its flare. Furious or sweet, she was equally formidable.

"It's a consecrated place," she said. "I want to sit in your mother's pew."

"This is ghastly," he thought, sweating with anxiety, as he sat down beside her.

"The worms are busy in the woodwork. My hand just now got into quite a pile of their dust," she told him, in a conversational tone.

He said to himself, "Here I am, well and sound. I can give her no help. She is quite alone, to go through that infernal ordeal." The thought of Eva gripped by natural forces to which she was nothing was horrible to him.

"The Yosts are lying outside, and your father," she said, in a soft passive tone. "I may go under tonight; but if it is to be so, you and I have been to church together here with our child, the next Yost. Whatever happens, you loved me first."

"Oh, dearest! "

"Are you mine? Are you? Ah! Now I'll go anywhere. I'm satisfied," she murmured, as if she had snatched at a joy and got it whole and ripe.

There was very little said between them on the way home. Covered with misty silver light the mountains had their midnight look, suggesting superhuman beings with great powers of enchantment, which they would

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use for delusion and derision. The night somehow passed. Torture and confusion and suspense became nothing more than the memory of a dreadful time, ended in light and peace.

Early in the morning George came galloping through Middleport, with his bare head wet with dew from brushing against low boughs. He looked exhausted, but his face shone. He had scarcely remembered Mary or Luther for hours, not until he thought of coming to tell his great news.

Daniel Hain was standing talking to Mary at her door. Hopeless though it might be, he had come as soon as possible to find out whether she felt at all friendly to him; he thought she seemed a little glad to see him, and cursed his luck because George and not he had been on hand the evening before. In the midst of these youthful feelings he heard a hail:

“ Goodmorning, Grandfather! ”

“ Well, well! ” he said, hastening to the gate.

“ A big, handsome boy,” George announced.

“ I congratulate you,” said Daniel, fervently.
“ How is Eva? ”

“ Not very well. She had a terrible time.”

“ A son! ” Mary thought, shrinking back into the shadow of the doorway.

She seemed very solitary to George when he looked over at her.

“ Mary, please tell Aunt Louisa,” he said, and hesitated. In his haste and excitement he could not explain why he had left Luther. “ I will be here to

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see you some time today," he said, in a regretful voice. "Now I must go back. Come to see our boy," he called, as he dashed away.

The other two were left standing there. Out of all the harrowing awkwardness Mary gracefully floated as if she did not feel it. Her congratulations were quite correct; she paid little heed to them herself.

"George did not say a word about leaving Father," she thought. "It didn't hurt Father. Let it go."

Two months later she consented to marry Daniel.

When she had done it and he had gone away and she found herself alone her clearest thought was, "So this is all! This is what I have looked forward to all my life." Later she said to herself, "Well, why not? He loves me; he wants me."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE third Saturday in August was the pleasantest day Eva had yet spent at Yost's. Christiana went away very early. Her going to Reading had been postponed so often that her daughter-in-law feared the important business would be transacted by letter after all. She stood about near the front door and watched Christiana start off, well dressed and independent, driving two handsome horses expertly. Now Eva felt wonderfully at home. Happy as could be, she went for a walk about the place, and sat in one room and then in another; all seemed unusually large and luxurious since the owner was not there. Every time the clock struck she regretted the hour that was gone.

About four in the afternoon Frederick himself, the boy, lay among the cushions in a corner of the sitting-room sofa. There he had lain for some time, being good-natured and too lazy to move much. He was a rosy baby with plenty of red, fuzzy hair. He gazed cheerfully at some pink and copper lustre-ware on the top shelf of the book-case, at the pink lilies on the table, and at his mother, who sat near the north window, crocheting his new white sack. Sometimes he held out his hands and looked at them, both palms

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and backs. Doing this he was so captivating that Eva picked him up and kissed him half a dozen times. Then, after carrying him about to see the pictures and look out of the windows, she took him on her lap and made him laugh at a striped ball, patiently picking it up as often as it fell.

"Darling! Did cross old Grandmother go away?" she said to him, joyously. "I wish your father would come in. You never were so sweet before. Oh, George, is that you? Oh, see! He knew your step."

Standing in the doorway George appeared very lean and taller than ever. He was resplendent with health, having become only a subject for reminiscence at the Seven Stars; and he had a cheerful expression, but it was no more than a transient light over his rather sombre face. He sat down near Eva; and watching the baby they were silent and contented.

After a while she said, "Haven't we been happy today?"

"Have you enjoyed it?"

"Did you hear any news?"

"I met your father on his way to Middleport, and they are all well at Mount Misery. He comes to see Mary nearly every day, I believe. It's surprising that he lets her put off the wedding until spring." Eva looked so disturbed that he added, "I wish you could be pleased with that marriage. I think it is a good thing."

"At his age?"

"He is only forty-four. He would have a great

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many years to live alone.”

“He has forgotten my mother.”

George made no reply. Seeing how very flat his mood was, she suggested, “You haven’t sung to me for a long time.”

“I don’t think of music nowadays. I do my part in church mechanically,” he slowly answered, remembering how often he had tried to make songs and found he could think of nothing but money.

“Sing anything. I want to hear your voice.”

She settled herself to listen: with her lashes down-cast she looked very gracious. He felt so little interest in singing that he did not walk across the hall to the piano, and at first his voice was not much more than a hum.

Trod by the breeze, the supple poplars quiver.

Back from far windows flames the evening red.
Somewhere a thrush repeats, “Oh, sweet forever!”

Eden was like this. Here are peace and bread.

Steep winds the path. The traveller goes lonely,
Hurt by the slippery rock and thornbush rude;
And at the summit, bleeding, finds he only
Free winds and starlit space and solitude.

Ah, but the effort! Not the vale Elysian,
Not years of peace, though lived on heights sublime,
Led on his soul with a sweet, tormenting vision.
’Twas not the top he longed for, but the climb.

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"I never heard that before," Eva said.

"I made it a couple of years ago. I had almost forgotten it."

After a few minutes he began again, rather tentatively.

Through autumn dusk the grayer smoke-clouds rise
From charring leaves.

Old housewives steep the lily-bud in wine
To heal a bruise.

It bears no fruit, burn out the briar.
So burns a heart in futile fire.

O joy of summer prisoned in the guise
Of brittle sheaves!

The languid fields which long have born the grain
Of orchids dream,
Glorious in their white and red,
Which feed no beast and make no bread.

The last lines came from his lips with passion. Her comment was a caress.

"Don't you like that at all?" he asked.

"It's such a queer song."

"I only tried at it while I was in the field."

Although she counted on the singing to render him responsive she crocheted very fast for several minutes before proceeding to say, in her soft voice, "When will you speak to your mother?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I won't wait much longer," she warned him, lightly.

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"I hoped you would change your mind about that."

"I can't. I want to get away. I must get away."

Their clear path ahead if they stayed at Yost's, and their large future there, with its manifold values, were plain in his mind; but he replied moderately.

"This is a dignified way of living; and we are comfortable here."

"In our one room? I sit on the porch, I walk in the fields; it doesn't matter where I may be. I am trusted with nothing. I am only an extra plate at the table. Oh!" she exclaimed, after this unique day of liberty desiring more such days acutely. "Oh, I want work! To work for ourselves, and plan it together! I want my own place!"

"What about Mother if we leave her alone?"

"Your mother would not have asked me to drive to Reading with her today for anything in the world."

Eva said no more, though many grievances, accumulated during the very period when she had expected to exercise a graceful dominance, were dammed up in her memory.

"I suppose you mean the small stone house on the other side of the creek? Is that it?" George asked, presently.

"That's what I thought of; and enough land for us to farm. I loved that little house as soon as I saw it. I was looking at it again this morning, and I know exactly what to do with it. Oh, George!"

To him the spaciousness of Yost's, the room to feel alone and free, was one of its great charms. He

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answered, abruptly, "That tumble-down place? There's nothing to it. This is not a practical idea at all."

"Do you think it dignified to live here, it may be for thirty years, dependent and waiting?"

"If we ourselves have the right feeling about it, yes." He was silent for some time, realizing that he could not expect loyalty to his family to predominate in her breast. He continued, painfully, "Eva, couldn't you give in a little?" and added, to himself, "If only Mother had done one spontaneous, warm-hearted thing for her I could point to it now."

"I'd rather be poor as poor than 'give in,' and 'get along,' here. It isn't worth it."

"That is your opinion. I want the boy to grow up at Yost's. It will be better for him."

"I can't bring up the boy in this house. There is constant interference. And you are anxious all the time, and it is wearing you out. I am very unhappy."

"Don't, dear. If you are unhappy I'll ask Mother for the little house."

"Will you do it soon?"

"I might as well."

"I thought it would be Heaven to be with you, and it will when we are alone."

"Don't you care for Yost's at all? You wouldn't find life better anywhere. After my years away I was so glad to get back."

She was struck by the unconscious homesickness in his tone; and after studying his face for a minute she

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began to condition and half promise to herself.

"In the little house we shall still be at Yost's; the boy can grow up here," she said to him, temporizing.

"Ask your mother; we'll see what she says."

"She's coming."

They shrank apart before Christiana, who walked in looking robust and very warm.

"Ah, there's my baby!" she said.

"See, he knows you," Eva responded, stopping midway in her escape from the room. "When he heard you he looked all around for you."

"Was he glad to see his grandmother? Precious little one!"

Paying no further attention to anyone, Christiana sat down, noted items, filed receipts, and counted the money in her purse. After everything was in order she locked the desk and turned away from it with her autocratic definiteness.

"Now we'll have supper. — Has the boy been well today?" she asked Eva, who was lingering in the hall.

"Very well. I think he is going to have your eyes."

"It's too soon to tell about his eyes."

At the table Christiana recounted the day's business to George, and they talked about it at length, while Eva sat unobtrusively quite outside the conversation. She scarcely heard it. She kept looking over at her husband in the course of her own animated thoughts.

"How interested he is in all that! Would he really sacrifice much if we left this place? I want him to be happy; I'll make him so. I'll help him: he doesn't

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know what I can do. But suppose she will not let us have the little house, what then? ”

A certain sheet of estimates was needed by Christiana for reference, and George went to fetch it. Freddy had been made comfortable in a big chair, and he was good; but he saw no prospect of anything except further being good, and his father walked out without stopping to entertain him. He began to make small protests. Christiana looked at him, and laid down her fork.

“What’s wrong with the boy?” she said.

“He wants to be held,” Eva replied.

Losing sight of all she had been discussing, Christiana fidgeted and anxiously watched the baby while he wriggled and fretted and broke out into a wail. Then she asked, “Won’t you take him?”

“He must learn that he will not get his own way by being naughty. He knows the difference well enough between can and can’t.”

“Poor little fellow, how he has to cry! Dear little, delicate baby!”

“He will soon get tired of it. Do you think he is delicate?” Eva said, pleasantly.

“You will have a very sick child.”

Beginning to exert himself, Freddy stiffened his body, threw back his head, and cried as hard as he could. With the angry screams piercing her ears, and feeling every one of her mother-in-law’s excoriating looks, Eva sat as if she were all alone amid cool groves. Then the baby made himself truly terrifying; he

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became quite silent suddenly.

"Oh, look at him!" cried Christiana. "He is holding his breath."

"What a will he has, the little man! This morning he did that for me until he turned purple."

On his way back through the hall George heard his mother exclaim, "I can't sit by and see it!" She hurried across the room, after which there was another outburst of screams. He stood still in distaste. Christiana started to walk up and down, lulling the baby, who lamented in a heartbroken and self-pitying fashion. Eva seemed quite passive. But he reached the door just as she sprang to her feet and held out her arms. The older woman stopped, with the baby pressed to her breast.

"Give him to me," Eva said.

"You needn't speak to me like that."

"Give him to me."

"Do you think I don't know how to take care of a child?"

"I am taking care of this one, please understand." Eva stamped her foot.

"I suppose I may be glad he wasn't weaned on wine."

George came quickly, and lifted the baby out of Christiana's arms. "Don't you interfere, Mother," he said. "What Eva does for this child is right."

"Since when are you an authority on baby-raising, George?" asked Christiana. She mastered her sense of outrage, though it was complete indeed, and pro-

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ceeded to admonish Eva emphatically. "You must learn how to treat this little one, and you must control yourself. In your position as the child's mother and a member of our family certain things are expected of you! Remember that."

"Oh! The family! Well, there will be no more of this family. I wish I had never heard of your family."

"You don't mean that," George said, coolly.

Eva burst into tears, and hurried out of the room, with the baby in her arms. They both saw her appear around the corner of the house and go flying up toward the orchards.

"Here is the paper you wanted," George said. "Now I'd like you to finish what you were telling me. Suppose we go out for a while."

"Why, he is ordering me about!" Christiana thought. Well, well! And he is not against me."

When they had left the house and started along the Northkill road Christiana began to talk about her affairs with more freedom than usual. It seemed to her that George had never displayed such good business sense. The day's transactions were disposed of in a short time; but the two Yosts feeling drawn together, kept slowly on until they reached the stone bridge and stood leaning against the wall along its side. A little to the south of the bridge there was a great hole in the creek-bed, and they gazed into green, secret depths; the shadowy water flowed away under their feet. Though it was still day, and light covered

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the Blue Mountain, the beginnings of dusk were visible in the dark shade among the branches and in the intense, rich color of the pastures and cornfields rustling full of corn. A nighthawk cried "Peent! Peent!" as it flew back and forth, a speck in the clear sky. If any spirits began to stir hereabouts as night came on they were Christiana's dead, and if their phantoms could sustain a clinging particle of dust it was her earth. She and her son stood quiet, thinking of each other.

George debated whether the cordial silence should be broken for what he had to say, with all that was likely to follow; but he was obliged to say it, and no time would be more propitious than this. He ignored everything that had happened, and made his request with all the grace he could; and Christiana listened, amicably.

"That house and some land," she repeated. "So you want to start for yourself?"

"I think it would be better."

Instantly her heart had set up its old cry, "I can't let him go; I must have him where I can see him; he must be under my roof when he sleeps." But of that she gave no sign. Her manner was calm and reasonable.

"My father and my grandfather and his father, Johann Georg, kept the management as long as they lived. They did not split up the estate; that has never been our way. I see no reason to change."

It was so gently said that he hoped to persuade

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her. "Mother, it would make all the difference in the world to me." She made no answer, and he went on: "Won't you ever be as you used to be?"

"You took your choice," she said. "You can't expect to choose between two and then have both."

"I loved Eva. An obligation goes with that. Why, you know all about it! Think of Father. Can you be so hard on me?"

"You say you loved her; you believe that that justifies. Well, I — do not love her."

"I don't know what to do," he muttered.

His distressful reflections lasted until he noticed Christiana gazing very intently beyond him. There was Eva, with the baby asleep in her arms, coming along the Blue Mountain road. She appeared to be all alone with the mountain, and free; her face was gentle.

"She is a remarkably handsome young woman," Christiana thought. "I hate the sight of her."

With a friendly glance at her husband Eva addressed her mother-in-law: "I am very sorry for what I said. I didn't intend to speak to you so. I lost my temper, and I am ashamed."

Christiana looked away. It was her intention to make some response to this, but she felt so thoroughly hostile that she could not find a proper one.

"I have been talking to Mother about the house," George interposed, with tenderness.

"Then you did ask; you didn't let it go," Eva replied, in a joyous tone.

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“Suppose, George, that I presented you with the house and a hundred acres, and the stock you would need,” Christiana suddenly began. “You know what farming is: hard work and uncertain gains. Would you be better off at the end of a year than you are now?”

“We might be,” he answered.

“George,” Eva cried, eagerly. “You keep on as head man here, and we’ll do without the land and pay rent for the house. We can do it. I can get along.”

“Rent! He pay rent to me!” Christiana exclaimed. She detested the insincere things she had been saying; but to state, to this crude girl of another class, “If my son is away from me I shall die,” was impossible, like an exhibition of nudity. She announced, “The estate will stay as it is till the end of my time.”

“George, what will you do?” Eva inquired.

“We’ll decide it later.”

After a long pause Eva proceeded, thoughtfully: “You two appeared to be on very good terms when I came up. I know that that leaves me out. I walked up and down in the fields, and fought with myself to make myself sorry for what I said; and I was sorry. I have tried to please you, Mrs. Stroh — nobody knows how hard I have tried in this awful year — but you decided long ago that there was no good in me.”

“I was ready to give you credit for all the good I saw.”

“Then you haven’t seen any, not any!” Eva stopped as if appalled.

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“You are in a great hurry to get tiresome elderly people out of your way. On your wedding-day you coaxed my son into insulting me before guests in my own house,” said Christiana, suddenly. She had never before alluded to this. Now George did not know what other bitterness she might expose.

“George, don’t you know that she and I can’t live together? Aren’t you convinced of that now?” Eva cried.

There was a horrified silence. It was as if some taint from without, some spiritual trace hanging about in the air like a vapor or a poisonous dust, set them all against each other.

“You hate the sight of me,” Eva said to Christiana. “You don’t look at me if you can avoid it. Now you will not be obliged to look at me. You will have your mansion to yourself. Aren’t you glad?”

“What do you mean?” George asked.

“I hope you will give me a home where I can live. I hope you will. If not — .”

“Eva, you wouldn’t leave me?”

“I am going now,” she answered, in a business-like way. “I will not spend another night at Yost’s. Will you come with me?”

“What about our son?”

As Eva regarded the child on her breast her downward look was a caress. “You may have him,” she said, and held him out to Christiana. He did not wake as he was passed over into her outstretched arms.

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“What?” George exclaimed. “Would you desert him?”

“It would be perfectly proper for her to take him, wouldn’t it, if I were really unfit to bring him up?”

Christiana held the baby tight and asked, in a low, voice, “Can’t you give up your own way even for him?”

“His time will come when he grows up. My time is now,” Eva answered airily. “The family can go on, you don’t need me.”

“Eva,” George entreated. “You wouldn’t leave the little fellow. Why, he’s ours.”

“I want Yost’s to be his home.”

Carefully she smoothed out the rumpled front of her dress. When it was all smooth, she looked up at her husband.

“Well, George?”

“We’ll go home.”

“I am going to the Crossed Keys. Are you?”

“Stop this foolish talk.”

“Do you think it foolish? You will not know where I am this time tomorrow night. Goodbye.”

She walked away, over the bridge and away, until her white dress in the fading light was a misty spot.

Though she carried herself haughtily the look in her eyes had meant, “Can you do this to me? I love you.” She seemed enchanting to him as he stared after her, feeling more and more outraged.

“Mother!”

“My dear son! Come, we’ll go home.”

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“ I’ll bring her back! ” he exclaimed, each word more violent.

He ran; he caught up to Eva; and while Christiana watched they stood facing each other for a few moments, and then went on together.

The baby slept. The nighthawk still flew up and down crying, “ Peent! Peent! ” as Christiana started back to her house. At first she walked like a young woman; but in the sultry gloom under the trees she began to feel weak.

“ Poor little fellow, with such a mother! Now I am responsible for him. I must do the best I can. My son cares nothing for me; he has left me. Tomorrow he will not be coming in and out.”

When she had reached the house and climbed the steps she hesitated, in dread of all those empty rooms; for a while she sat motionless at her own door.

“ Before long I shall be old. Oh, I am lonesome! ”

She felt as if she were already dead, in the dark and alone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE air felt raw for September. The sun was drawing water; through a rift in the clouds descended soft golden beams. Shadows gray as dust or of the gray tints of stone filled the large, clean stable-yard back of the Crossed Keys. In the farthest corner a pack of pointers and setters, half starved so that they would hunt, kept whining and pulling at their straps. Dead squirrels and rabbits and dead birds lay in two heaps on the kitchen porch, beside cartridge-belts and stacked guns. Over a fire in the front part of the bake-oven hung an enormous copper kettle holding a flood of cider, which was boiling hard.

"If I have my apple-butter party while these hunters are here not a girl will miss it," Louisa Fry had reflected. "There will be very much work; also apple-butter full and plenty for the year; and at the bar very much money."

Another hour and the party would begin. George came out of the bar-room, and looked to see whether everything were ready. He wore a black shirt, old trousers and high boots suitable to a hostler; his face was a hard red. As the stage might arrive at any moment, he waited in the open air, leaning against a

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tree, where he could watch the road to Reading and also look through a window and see what was going on in the house.

Eight or ten men in shooting-clothes, sitting around the dining-table, sagged comfortably in their chairs and were hilarious. In spite of all that lay ahead of her this evening the accomplished Louisa had set out a meal which was no less than a Sunday dinner. Spacious platters of chicken, yellow with saffron and garnished with unlaid eggs; potato filling, brown and aromatic; cucumbers dressed with cream and onion; all were there; and on a side-table shoo-fly cakes waited, cream apple-tarts, and open-faced pastry designs full of raisins and lemon sauce, with sweet trimmings shaped like snails. Louisa, wearing a new brown gingham and a white apron almost as broad as a sail, appeared for a minute at a time, to bring in the waffles. Her manner was repressive and stately, for it was beneath her dignity to do this, but she would not miss the compliments. Eva and another young woman went back and forth, waiting on the men.

George tapped on the window several times, but no attention was paid to him until one of the hunters said to Eva, with a laugh, "You're wanted." Then she came out.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"What were those fellows saying to you?"

"Nothing much. They asked when the party would begin."

"Don't let them give you fees, Eva, please don't.

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That I can't stand. You'll go upstairs after supper, won't you? "

"How can I, with so much work to be done? We were glad enough to have Aunt Louisa hire us when we were homeless in the road. Besides I'd like to dance a little."

"Are you going in? Stay here a minute, won't you? I wish the stage would come. The new driver is slow on his first trip."

She did not answer, but she lingered beside him, with a loyal and gentle air.

George could see a whole set of bright hopes destroyed and in a short while have them all replaced with others. Often as he had appealed to her, each time he thought that perhaps now she would relent. He said, presently, "I saw the boy today. One of the girls had him out in a handsome, new baby-carriage. He was fast asleep."

Eva gave him an observant glance.

"What are we going to do? " he asked.

"Yes, what are we going to do? "

As he continued to look at her urgently, she said, with quiet intensity, "That one day when we were alone it seemed as if I sent out roots into the place. Oh, I could love my own home! "

"Let me buy that farm south of Yost's with Father's money."

"And live with a mortgage, worked half to death, as I lived at Mount Misery? I know what poverty does; I grew up in a poverty-stricken household. It

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is better for my baby to be where he is."

In silence George waited for whatever she had to propose. She brought it out.

"We must go to the city."

"Is that it?"

"Can you bear to stay here, George?"

"Not here at the Crossed Keys. I understand farming. In town I don't know how it would go."

"There is no advantage for us in farming anywhere except at Yost's. In town it is easy to make money. There is your music."

"Don't bring that up, I tell you! That's gone. My voice is nothing. My hands are stiffer and stiffer. I'm ashamed to show my face in the choir anyhow. No, it's over — that bird is dead. To blow a cornet in the band and make half a dollar extra for you — that's my mark now."

"Don't talk so loud."

"Oh, I'm quite sober. I'm going to stick to what I know; and I'd rather live hereabouts. I'd like to do the right thing by Mother too." As Eva's lips remained tightly closed, he added, "It's hard on you, dear. I want to give you everything a woman wants."

"You pull one way, I the other; and here we stay."

They moved apart, with a little fear.

"I must go in now," she said.

"Think it over, dear."

So that he should not witness her return to the dining-room he walked hastily away from the window, then stopped and gazed about him. It was growing

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dark. In the west hung narrow red clouds, and the mountains looked almost black. The water-trough dripped steadily. The dogs got up and flung themselves down again and again. He was conscious of his hands, which had not felt clean for weeks, and of his dirty clothes; he shivered unexpectedly. The world seemed empty, with a vast, dull pain somewhere, not his exactly, but which he had to share.

"I wish I had someone to talk to me," he said to himself. "I wonder what Father would think of my way of living; and what will my boy think? I wish I could forget that I am a poor soul. Why do I stand around out here? I'll go in and eat. There's the stage."

Rather eagerly he watched the cumbersome thing coming along the road and into the stable-yard. He wanted to see the new driver. The driver descended from his seat and unloaded the freight while the passengers dispersed. He was tall, considerably under thirty, dressed in well-made, old gray clothes. A beam of light from a door just opened fell across his face as he turned, and showed him looking half asleep, but his features were handsome. Pleased to find such a companionable man, George approached him as if he were a visitor at Yost's, and the stranger answered the greeting with a slight nod, glancing leisurely about over the premises.

"Aren't you rather fresh for a hostler?" he said, amiably. "Here is what you want. Take good care of my horses."

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As he offered to lay some money in George's outstretched hand the latter turned his back and walked off to the farthest and darkest corner of the yard. The driver moved toward the porch, where Eva was standing in the light which streamed through the doorway.

"She saw that; she heard," George thought, and swore to himself.

The stage-driver went on until he was not more than five feet from her. "Where shall I put the mail-bag?" he inquired, in dialect.

"The man who comes for the mail-bag could not wait. My husband will take it to the post-office."

Motionless, she surveyed the stranger with calm, smiling eyes, as he stood quietly looking up at her. Presently she remarked, "You are just in time for the party."

"Are you going to have a party?"

With long strides George came out of his corner, leaped ostentatiously up the steps and placed himself close beside her.

"This is my husband," she explained, flushing. "We are only here temporarily."

The driver gazed at them deliberately and without answering strolled away to the bar-room. Eva vanished into the house. George stood where he was. It amused him to have asserted himself to this fellow clownishly. He was about to go, in a state of satisfaction, to get his supper, but a loud voice called an order to him; and dishes were rattling and suddenly

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there was a great flying about as the guests began to arrive for the apple-butter boiling. Footsteps and gay talk came nearer along the street. Carriages drove up. By the time he had finished at the barn the party was in full swing. He carried all the tubs and apple-bags to their places, hurrying back and forth before the nicely dressed girls.

The hunters smoked in the bar-room. Numerous young men who looked as if they were waiting to be wound up stood about outside. Before long the company settled down in groups to the business of the evening, and the many conversations made a loud hum. Quantities of apples as they were pared went thudding into the tubs. When instalments of them were turned into the boiling cider, its delicious odor, already spread over the place, became stronger. Louisa herself began the stirring, and hauled the long crank back and forth vigorously, with a proud air. Since this operation could not be allowed to stop for one minute six or seven responsible women stayed near the kettle and took turns. After gossiping a while they began to talk about death and the most serious occurrences of life, while the fire burned red and blue and more stars came out.

There was dancing in the parlor until past midnight; but George could not take part in it; he belonged with the band, which stood in the street and played. After about an hour and a half it became quite hard work to stand up with the cornet and blow. His lessons on that instrument had been few and a joke;

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and he made the leader nervous by being very loud at times, so that the tune was drowned out. He looked on at the party, watching it through the windows when he was not working at the music; and what he saw in that intermittent way appeared as sudden and bright-colored as a phantasmagoria flashed by a magic lantern.

It was a very successful occasion, quite up to Louisa's expectations and with no wallflowers. The hunters were sought after, their shooting-clothes conspicuous; all the girls seemed very gay. Eva danced three dances, one with the stage-driver, who after that looked on for ten minutes and then went out. Another supper appeared, cold but handsome, with impressive, unusual pies and piles of pink pickled eggs. Everybody enjoyed it, including George, who got something to eat at last.

At two o'clock the party still kept up; the guests went away gradually. The Crossed Keys was in disorder from end to end, and it was beginning to rain. After giving him strict directions Louisa left George alone in charge of the apple-butter, which boiled and boiled. The yard had become perfectly quiet. The dogs slept where they were tied. The fire flickered; the rain touched his face; music that he used to play went running through his head.

CHAPTER XX

THE northeast wind, blowing before the equinox, made a wild rush across the fields; the spruces in front of the house bent and sighed. Christiana raised her eyes to a window, and thought, "What a dark night! And Luther is lying out there!"

Though it was very late, and a lonely evening, she stayed on beside the sitting-room lamp. That room was the heart of Yost's; she had known John George's black walnut secretary and the glittering old lustre-ware all her life; her eyes met the eyes of her parents and of her son in pictures on the wall. She knitted steadily while carrying on an imaginary conversation with Luther, her old friend. To him, for many years the only person who pointed out her mistakes with understanding, she now mentally appealed, in her stately solitude, and he comprehended perfectly. There was no point at which she wished to have acted otherwise, she wistfully told him. She understood that the divine will was done, the divine judgment made clear, by the transmission of human experience; that was its channel. But who had been taught or in any way benefited by her troubles? She asked Luther that. A sharp pain went through her when she realized that he was gone; she wanted him very much.

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To live on in the dear old place was a great happiness, she said to herself. And she had the boy. He would care for Yost's after her death, and perhaps he would be fond of her. At her age a woman wanted the affection of a child more than any other love: it was the kind best worth having.

“Love! Grown men and women do wrong, and give that as their reason. If they believe what they say, they are blasphemers. My son is one of them; and for this common girl. If that is love, it is a poisonous thing. I am not strange to it, but it does not make me false and servile. — What's that? ”

It seemed to be a step outside on the flagstones. Christiana looked at every window alertly, but there was nothing there, they were rectangles of empty black.

“People say that Grandfather Yost walks over sometimes to see how it goes here. Tonight I would not close the door against a ghost if it were my own kin. Oh, if I could have a talk with one of my own! ”

Certainly that sounded like a step, like something restless wandering around the house. She heard it several times; then it stopped, and she forgot it before long. The clock ticked; the yarn continually ran off the ball and was used. Her soul felt naked and solitary, surrounded by empty space and moving on with time, she did not know where.

She began to feel an uneasy sensation, and she knew that there were eyes fixed on her, watching her from somewhere. After being conscious of them for

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several minutes she heard a faint, distinct noise, at which instantly her mind pictured a hand tapping with one finger-nail against glass; but nothing showed itself at any of the windows.

"Is someone about?" she thought. "I need a dog."

Although neither sound was repeated she opened a window and leaned out. A warm, lifeless quiet prevailed; the darkness smelt of autumn leaves. She stood looking steadily into it until her eyes adapted themselves, and the velvety black seemed to thin in places and become lead-color. Then, as if one of the departed, with whom she had been living all evening, revealed his silent presence, there stood a man where a moment ago she had seen nothing. Just within the illumination from her lamp, he appeared shadowy, with blackness all around. He was a young, powerful man; his expression was sombre; he observed her indifferently.

After waiting a reasonable time she closed the window and returned to her chair.

"If that is a spook," she said to herself, in broad dialect, "it is not Grandfather Yost, and never was. He wouldn't look like that. I wonder who it is; I wonder what it wants. I hope nobody else will see it. I might have trouble with the girls. A spook!"

Feeling quite pleased, she began to knit again and to think of her difficulties hopefully. Eva would not be Louisa's servant long; she would break out somehow, and then possibly George would come back. Christiana

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did not define what else she anticipated for Eva; she left her to Providence.

“ Ah! ”

The Georgian doorway was not twenty feet from where she sat, and the curved sashes of the side-lights looked very white against the dark beyond the panes. A knock, hardly more than a brushing against the door-panel, made her listen not only with her ears but with her whole body. Then a cautious scraping began inside the lock; and the key fell out on the floor.

“ This is different from a spook. How often have Luther and Louisa prophesied that I should get into trouble through counting my money when the blinds were up! There isn't a man nearer than the tenant-house. I won't call.”

Quietly she took her revolver out of her desk, and held it low while she opened the door with her left hand.

“ Good-evening,” said a courteous voice.

“ Good-evening.”

The man she had seen stepped in and she permitted it.

“ What do you want? ” she inquired.

“ I want to make your acquaintance.”

“ Who are you? ”

“ You don't need that revolver.”

“ How do I know that you will not try to murder me? ” she asked contemptuously.

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“ Well, how do you know? Hadn’t you better not provoke me? ”

He followed her into the room, and waited for her to speak.

“ Why did you act so foolishly? ” she said.

“ I wanted you to understand that I was coming in. You don’t seem to be frightened.”

“ It’s burglary.”

“ I knew you wouldn’t scream. This is not the first time I have watched you through that window.”

“ State your business.”

“ Yes. At this time in the evening we shall not be interrupted. I have looked forward for a long while to meeting you. I find that you are very highly esteemed. All the Middleport people are ready to talk about your affairs. By the time I got to the hotel on my first trip I knew a good deal; and I have become acquainted with your son, too. Well, Yost’s is a splendid place. You must be very proud of your handsome daughter-in-law.”

“ Will you say who you are and what you want? ”

“ Certainly. I am the new stage-driver. I rose in life, and bought the route because I wanted time to see the lay of the land here. Formerly I was a horse-swipe. That’s a man who looks after a race-horse, — not the trainer, you understand. The swipe feeds the horse, grooms him, and watches over him night and day. For pay he gets enough to keep him in rotgut — cheap whiskey; he wears anything in the shape of shirt and trousers that he can lay hold of, and sleeps

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against the horse's belly. You didn't know there were men in the world living like that. I've been a jockey too, when I was a little fellow, before I grew too big and heavy to ride."

"Where were your parents? "

"Swipes are like shad-flies: nobody asks where they come from. My mother died not long ago. She was a chambermaid at the cheap hotel in Reading where I was born; she peeled potatoes and scrubbed floors. How she had to hustle the buckets! Anybody could have cheated her."

Christiana watched him closely; but she was not harrowed at all, nor in any way affected by his peculiar, impassive insolence. It appeared not to make the slightest difference what she said to this stranger, at such an hour, in these queer circumstances; and one thought, habitual to her lonely mind, was all ready to burst out.

"I hope there may be a good, real result somewhere from cheating and lies and every kind of falseness."

He looked as if he had found something unexpected which pleased him. "You can't sidetrack me; but I admire you," was expressed in his face, which suddenly became animated and rather boyish.

"Maybe your mother was lucky," said Christiana, eagerly. "How about your father? "

The visitor smoothed his long moustache, and observed her. She appeared a fresh, handsome, unsatiated creature.

"My name is Beneval Gartman," he remarked.

"Is it? "

CHAPTER XXI

THE twilight had grown dark enough to make it hard to recognize anyone except an enemy or an object of love. A surprisingly loud sound was caused by George's steps as he came along, the only person on the street in the whole length of Middleport. He walked with his eyes fixed on the ground, whistling faintly.

On Louisa's front porch Nicholas Siess was sitting in a corner all by himself. There he had been for an hour. He was tired enough to be aimless; he kept putting off the long drive home to the Seven Stars; and his angry disappointment did not abate at all. Being hard pressed for money, he had counted on having the polls for the coming primaries located at his establishment; and he had gone to Reading on an unseasonably hot day, and offered a certain sum in the proper quarter, only to hear that elections would be held in Middleport as usual. He was not even sure whether he were encountering the scorn of the virtuous or whether what he could afford were not enough. Nothing was to be done except to travel back again, over a hilly road full of stones and ruts. He had felt inclined to view his competitor's premises, so he had stopped at the Crossed Keys, where all was

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neatness and prosperity; and when he ordered supper Louisa had said, "My stove is cold. You want to talk to me? I don't want to talk to you."

As he recognized George loitering and peering at him his rancorous thoughts turned in another direction. He pitied his daughter Flossy for her deficiencies, and was fond of her. More than once, after her hero ceased to appear at the Seven Stars, he had come upon her weeping; and it gave him a strange feeling to remember those tears, though she was now not so badly married."

George said, "How are you, Nick? I didn't know you in this light."

"You haven't been at my place lately. Even Valentine doesn't talk about you any more. I heard you were hostler here, but I didn't know how to believe it," Nicholas responded; and they shook hands. "The hound!" he thought, with a surge of antipathy. "I'd like to kick him. He didn't care how much poor Floss suffered."

No one drove up, and there was no sound of teams in the stable-yard, so George lounged and watched Mary walking about in her garden. His civil questions were answered absently from the arm-chair under the trumpet-vine. Presently Nicholas said, "I want to congratulate you on your young step-father."

"What's that?"

"Didn't your mother tell you? She oughtn't to have let you hear it from a stranger. That fellow Gartman who drives the stage, he visits her every

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evening," Nicholas answered, as if he grudged the information.

" You liar! "

" That's no lie. Everybody who passes that way sees them sitting together, blinds up, like an old couple. The boys at my place have lots of fun about Gartman's elderly girl. Ask any of them. I was surprised to hear it of Christiana Yost. Does he intend to marry her, or what? "

" I'll shut your mouth."

" Hold on! What good will it do you to fight me? Gartman started off to your mother while I was sitting here. Yes, it always makes a big difference to grown children. No doubt she can will away every stick. I think he will marry her."

Nicholas raised his voice so that George should hear the last words although he had gone into the house.

He needed Eva, to be soothed by her, to have her for a partizan, while he did what a man should. He tramped through the hallways, and startled her in the semi-darkness outside their bedroom door.

" What is it? " she asked. " I ought to change my dress."

" I must see you. It's about Mother. An ugly thing is being said, — oh, it's an outrage! "

" Indeed? What? "

" I don't want you to know anything about it. I can't question anyone about it. This would not have happened if I had been where I belong; but I turned

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my back on her, and they all thought she was defenceless."

"Did you hear the story just now? Perhaps it will not amount to much."

"A scandal is being spread about my mother," he repeated, haughtily. "I am going now to tell her that tomorrow we shall come home."

With quiet movements, keeping her eyes lowered, Eva lighted a lamp, while he stood looking at her urgently.

"You want me to protect my mother, don't you?"

"Do you think she cares to have us at Yost's?"

"I know she does." He had affirmed this before, many dreary times.

"You know how she feels toward me."

"We can't consider that now. She'll get over it. She must."

"You demand what I hate the very worst."

"You wouldn't refuse. This concerns us all."

"This time — will you be stubborn this time?" she thought. "Can't I reach him?"

Seeing that she grew very pale, he put his arms around her. "I wouldn't have you hear it, I wouldn't have it touch you; but I'll tell you the facts if you want to judge for yourself. For the boy's sake we can't let this pass," he pleaded; but she did not yield at all, and presently freed herself, and stood still and pensive. "I'm an old story to her now," he thought, watching her, fighting hard against her charm.

She took off her apron, surveyed it, and dropped it

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on a chair. "George," she said, abruptly. "I can't go back there. It would make a devil of me."

"Won't you stick to me?"

She moved away to the window, and looked blankly out where the trees were tossing.

"Now I must go," he said.

Imaginary scenes passed through her mind, memories and much that she feared. "Where can I go?" she thought. "This will happen, or that will happen. Whichever way I turn — How splendid my husband used to be."

"You know what I shall tell Mother."

"Yes," she murmured; and she went slowly across the room, and began to run a comb through her hair.

"You will be glad, I think, after a while," he said, with his eyes on her impassive, bright-hued reflection in the glass. "She can't give in," he thought, the more regretful because her open resistance had been so brief and depressed. "I'll make it up to her, poor darling."

Now the important thing was to see his mother, to find out what could have been the occurrence associating her with Gartman which had made Nicholas's slander take this strange form, and to put the whole horrible story out of existence. He left the house, and took the short cut across the fields. Full of burning energy, he vaulted fences, waded in his hostler's boots across the Northkill at a shallow place, went toward Yost's. He looked to see the broad ray from his

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mother's lamp coming through the north window; he felt very near to her.

At all the sitting-room windows the blinds were down to the sills, showing scarcely any light. Quietly he kept on over the turf. Even while he believed the story to be made out of whole cloth, an unformed idea that it was fair to spy out the presence of an enemy made him stop at the front door and look in through a side-light. He could see into the sitting-room, he took in the whole astounding scene. Beneval Gartman was there. Christiana and he were seated opposite each other, like two friends having a business conversation. Money, a large amount of money — green and yellow bank-notes in neat piles, stacked silver, little towers built of gold — covered the table between them. Although in that locality debts were almost always paid in cash George had never beheld such a sum as that; it would have put him on his feet and freed him from all his worst cares. He waited to see what would happen, and strongly repelled every impression that would make him credit Nicholas. Before very long the two began, still talking, to place the money in pouches and a wallet, which Beneval then stowed away about him. When that was done there came a pause. Then they both rose. They were grave, having reached a termination of some sort. Beneval clasped Christiana's hand and regarded her intimately; and she turned as lightly as a girl, laid her free hand on his shoulder, and scanned his face. Her expression was at once wrathful and sad.

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She moved away with dignity when her son came bursting in.

"Is it you, George?" she said, rather wistfully. As she remarked his crimson face and overbearing, excited manner the thought that he might be drunk went through her mind. "Do you want to see me?" she asked, speaking very distinctly. "You must wait a while."

George walked close up to Beneval, and said, "Get out of this house."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Get out, or I'll throw you out."

After a glance at Christiana to ascertain her wishes Beneval stepped back and stood passive.

"I invited him. I like to have him here," said she.

"Mother, not an hour ago I heard an ugly report, and I'm here to tell you that we shall come back tomorrow morning."

"What ugly report did you listen to about me?"

The answer formed in George's mind, but could not be spoken.

"Whatever it is, you don't believe it?"

"I'm coming home," he repeated. "Will you have us?"

"You do believe it."

Christiana gazed at this recipient of her tenderness as if to identify him. "No one could have convinced you of anything against your mother unless you were willing; but you credited the scandal from some loafer's mouth."

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"I did not. I saw the money you handed over to this man, a pile of money; and that wasn't all."

"What you saw was not for me. Listen: I know what the slander is," Beneval said; and George understood that he did indeed know all of it. "In these little towns there is no limit to what people will say, with their rancid minds. Most women are only so-so, and a man may as well pick a peach that hangs low. Your mother, however, is above the common run, afraid of nothing and as straight as a die. I came here for money and got it; but as to what you heard, it's a lie, a fool's lie, so help me God. Does that satisfy you?"

"Why should it? What do I know about you? Who are you?"

Beneval looked amused, and there passed over Christiana's lips a faint, momentary smile; it was plain enough to George that she joined with that other in deriding him. When she saw his bitter, miserable look her indignation died down no less quickly than it had flared up.

"You would not comprehend why I did as I did — not in this world," she said, mournfully.

"I'll stand by you, never fear."

"But how can you blame me? Suppose I marry this friend of mine. You have done as you pleased more than once."

"Mother, aren't you ashamed?" He stopped, and uttered no more until he had forced out of his mind the old idea of his mother, throne and all, and put

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this new one in its place. "I must speak: I'm Paul Stroh's son? How could you bear the change? Was it just anybody, any sort of a living man — ?"

"Now I do understand," said Christiana, slowly. "Yes, you are Paul Stroh's son. Now you must become acquainted with your brother."

"Oh! So you too have done as you pleased."

"What? *I*? Of course you would think that!" The change in her was frightfully sudden and violent, as if a mountain which had always been fertile and a bulwark blazed roaring into eruption. "This man is also Paul Stroh's son, his elder son."

George stood looking at his own hand, which rested on the table.

"I went through everything to keep it from you; I wanted you not to know as long as you lived. I bought the proofs tonight at an enormous price, and paid cash so there should be no signature or record of any transfer. Now I see that it is well for you to know."

She unlocked her secretary deliberately, and disclosed an old-fashioned wooden treasure-chest, of a small size used for trinkets and papers. When she opened that George saw shabby things: a book, a little, black case for a likeness, a bundle of letters. The long unopened book was the Confessions of Saint Augustine, with Paul Stroh's name in it, and many notes and marginal markings. George remembered his father's face well enough to recognize the picture in the black case. The letters were addressed

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to a woman. He unfolded one, and found Paul Stroh's certificate of the baptism of his son, called Beneval Gartman, enclosed with another sheet. There long devotion and close companionship were written plain. After putting these papers back neatly into the bundle George laid it next to the picture and the book, to make a row.

"So you paid for that junk?" he remarked.

"Don't you believe what I told you? I know it's true."

"It is not."

"You read what your father wrote. That is his writing."

"Forgery."

"Tell him," said Christiana.

Beneval spoke unaggressively.

"My mother was the only child of well-to-do, dignified people away off in the hills in Schuylkill County. When she was a young girl, not twenty, she became melancholy, thought herself eternally lost. Somebody heard of Paul Stroh's powers as a minister, and sent for him. It was one of his miracles; he made the most of it; he was a prince to her. Within a month she ran away from home, and though her father followed her he wouldn't take her back, and she wouldn't go. She never saw him again, or her mother.

"It was kept very quiet. Her parents were the only ones beside those two who knew the whole story, and they made up some tale. We lived in Reading, and we used to go to Philadelphia to meet my father.

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He wanted to baptize me as respectably as he could, and they waited until they gave up hope; then it was done in our room, nobody there but ourselves, all kneeling along the bed to pray; and that was off his mind." Beneval observed George out of the corner of his eye, and proceeded. "This watch of mine was Father's present to my mother one Christmas. You see it has only her initials and the date, nothing dangerous. Of course we could never spend Christmas together; but that year he got away the week before, and came to us in Philadelphia, and took me to see the shop-windows. Then they still looked forward to being married; he intended to tell the truth."

Christiana, standing with clasped hands, listened and thought, "And those days with her were his happy days, through all the years with me."

"I won't hear any more of this," George said, with determination; but his voice sounded sick.

"One day Father visited us unexpectedly in Reading, running a big risk. I was told by my mother long afterward that he said he couldn't live in that way any longer, and he couldn't get free. It wasn't in him to break away, poor devil! Then for four or five months he didn't come near us. He had talked her into letting him end the whole thing; but to keep to that was beyond her. She thought she could come here to see him like any other person in trouble, so we presented ourselves one evening. You were at the gate."

"Had you a lame rat-terrier with you?"

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“Yes.”

Christiana and Beneval regarded George for some time while he paid no attention to them. His mind was laboring with certain fundamental facts of his own life, which shifted heavily into their proper places.

“It was my beauty,” he said to himself. “My beauty! No wonder Father was bowled over.”

Beneval continued, “Your mother found us in this room, and sat talking to us; and Father walked in on the two of them. Of course he couldn’t carry it off, and the whole thing came out. They had it hot, all three. My mother and I were packed out of this house, you may believe. After that Father was with us occasionally; but he went down hill fast, and in about a year my mother told me he was dead.”

Christiana in proud silence waited for what George would say.

He said, “Did he leave her enough to keep her comfortable?”

“She allowed nothing of that kind; she worked.” Beneval named a cheap hotel in Reading. “The people in the house let her alone, she passed for a widow, and except where he was concerned she didn’t care much. She landed where your wife has landed; but my mother never got away from it. Two months ago she died there.”

George thought over this. Running back and forth through hallways, rendering intimate services, hearing indecent language, witnessing brawls andsprees, his

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pretty lady had dragged along and died in the grime.

“ He didn’t keep her under by bullying? ”

“ No; and he didn’t deceive her. We got the leavings, but it was her own choice,” Beneval answered. He thought, “ What is hitting him so hard about Mother? My brother is a queer fish.”

“ Why was there no divorce? ”

“ Your mother wouldn’t give it to him. He begged for it many times that last year; he told her he would never drop us; but she stuck to it. She was no coward, to stand aside for us.”

“ You did that? ” George demanded of Christiana. “ Was this too much for the Yosts? And so Yost’s held him till he died! Sneak though he was, sickening hypocrite, I believe he died of shame.”

“ He ashamed! He let girls and unborn children pay for what he took and enjoyed,—the meanest thief there is! ” Beneval said; and he cursed Paul Stroh thoroughly.

Christiana, with a bitter taste in her mouth, replied, “ Your place is always in the other camp, isn’t it, George? With the poor souls, the paupers and the greedy.”

Not noticing her, George opened the Confessions roughly, glanced into it here and there without knowing that he did so, and thrust it into his pocket. Then he left them.

He went to the mountain. The night had become cloudy; the air was mild. As he raced up a wood-road only a few dim stars were shining in the strip

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of sky between the tree-tops, and a light wind moved through the darkness over miles of forest. Desiring to get close to the earth, he turned into a footpath which he knew well, followed it for a short distance, and threw himself down under a pine-tree. He had dreadful feelings of brokenness and loss. Now he could never go home. There was no such place as he had believed his home to be, with its dignity and genuineness; there never had been. There was instead a large house where disgraceful things, well covered up, went on and on. His insults to his mother did not seem to matter, for there was nothing left of her either. He knew from experience what she was capable of in her lofty security at Yost's; he knew exactly how she had gone about it when she overpowered Paul Stroh. As he went over the facts about his dignified mother, and his pretty lady and his saintly father, they mocked him. His whole spiritual outlook was mocked by the one whom he had imagined a spirit in bliss; he could not bear to be his father's son. He thought of the Yosts who had died, and wondered what had been their ugly secrets.

At day-break a flock of sparrows roused him with their twittering, and he moved painfully and opened his eyes. The spot was one he had known ever since he was old enough to climb the mountain; a drapery of poison-ivy on a cedar-tree looked rich red in the twilight, and green branches had red tips; the sweet-sounding wind through the pine-needles felt cold. He

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slowly remembered that the world was changed, a charm gone forever.

He needed time to bring himself to go down to Middleport, meet Eva and begin the day. He was too tired to have tact and initiative. For a while he walked aimlessly along the path through the woods; and on reaching an open space he stopped altogether, and stood gazing down on the village, the church and the shining stream. The sun was coming up: the wide country far below his feet rose through morning mist to meet the light; and one old, solitary tulip-poplar, struck by a sunbeam, was bright gold from root to top, in the midst of the eternal fields.

The mood of the night and his wholesale distrust cleared away. While he stood looking at the peaceful land its strength came into him in a soft, limitless flow; he recovered the spirit of his forebears who had held that land dear.

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.”

“What is past is done with. I am going on.”

He brushed the spider-webs off the front of his coat, and started down the mountain. Now he was free. Every one of the enchantments that held him at Yost's had been destroyed. He was poor, but he was free and independent, not tied to any place or obligated to any way of thinking. He walked fast in his eagerness to tell Eva that they would go that day, anywhere, and that he was all ready to take chances.

It seemed that several people about the Crossed

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Keys looked at him oddly; then Louisa called him into the parlor and closed the door. Eva was not there. She had gone away in the stage, on the front seat beside Beneval Gartman. Louisa did not understand it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE day wore on. Late in the afternoon Louisa sat in Mary's workroom, which was full of sallow light, and gazed through a window absently. Mary kept on with her sewing although her hands were tense; she wore a little engagement-ring with an amethyst in it. Nobody came, nothing had been heard all day, nothing happened.

"I will wait one half hour longer, and then I will open George's door," Louisa said, scarcely above a whisper, although no one else was in the house.

"Are you afraid to open it?"

"No, I'm not afraid; but this is a strange thing for him to do. I wish his mother were here."

"Have you thought of sending for her?"

"What could I say to her? After I told him about Eva he ran upstairs, and I heard his key turn, and I haven't seen him since, but I can't be certain that he is still in that room. I wish you expected Daniel."

"He said nothing about coming today. Aunt Louisa, Dan would not want to be kept in the dark a moment."

"Maybe Eva will step innocently off the stage this evening."

"I am sure she will. How close it is!" Mary

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laid her work aside and went to a window. "Why, look down the road!" she said. "Surely that is Dan."

He walked in buoyantly, as if he had reached home. When he grasped what Louisa was trying to tell him he stood still in the middle of the room and heard all she could communicate, and asked some brief questions.

"Give me your pass-key," he said.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mary, who saw a delicate equilibrium threatened.

"Find out the facts. I have left Eva to Stroh long enough."

"Probably it is all just nothing," Mary assured him.

"I don't believe anything of the kind about my girl. But who knows what her husband did to her? If he can't give me a satisfactory account I'll go after her to Reading. Louisa, I have very little time to get to the train. Send Sylvester word that I shall not come home tonight, will you? And keep everything as quiet as you can until you see me. It's nobody's business."

"He knows at once what to do," Mary said to herself, regarding him discriminatingly as he crossed the street.

There was nobody in the hall at the Crossed Keys. The second story was deserted, and very quiet except for one sound, a hard, stertorous breathing in George's room. Daniel knocked and tried the door. In the moment or two that he waited, listening, he said to him-

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self that he might have known Eva would do this; he thought of her mother as he unlocked the door and closed it behind him. The light was dim, the air stale. George lay on the bed, stretched out in a profound stupor, shaken by his snoring breaths. His face was crimson against the white bed-cover; cobwebs and burrs from the mountain still stuck to his clothing, and one hand hung down toward the floor where he had dropped his bottle. After observing him attentively without touching him Daniel looked about and saw that the best of Eva's dresses were missing, and that the wash-bowl held the burned remains of a letter.

"She has gone for good; and this man, this poor excuse, could do no better than get dead drunk. Whatever she may have done, she had reason for it," Daniel thought, as he departed.

He spoke to Louisa, who was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, and to Mary across the road he gave a farewell gesture and a look. She felt unpleasantly surprised without knowing why; as she watched him gallop away she comprehended that there had been something unsatisfied in his manner, something doubtful of herself. It occurred to her that the tie holding her to Daniel was frail and could be broken by a few words; but she thrust that out of her mind. There at the window she stayed until the stage came in. No woman was in it; she looked at the new driver and the passengers until they had all dispersed and it was certain that Eva was not among them.

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“ Whatever happens I am outside of it,” she told herself. “ What are George Stroh’s affairs to me? ”

All the next day that window framed her profile; and half a dozen times an hour she glanced along the roads, but again no one appeared who might have been expected, from Yost’s, from Mount Misery or anywhere. Louisa came over to say that she had heard George get up and move about before dawn, and that she had slipped out and watched him go down to the creek, where he hid in the bushes. There was no more for her to tell. The evening was half gone when Mary, still gazing out at intervals, saw Daniel at the gate; she went to meet him in great anxiety.

“ Did you find them? ” she asked.

“ They are not in Reading.”

“ Did you hear of them? ”

“ Yes. Gartman sold the stage route a week ago, for a good price. I hunted the town over; and I found a man who saw him at the station, with a handsome girl all in new clothes like a bride. I accomplished nothing. I might as well not have gone.”

“ What will you do now? ”

“ What can I do? What good would a detective be, and court-proceedings, as long as she is with him? If she ever comes back I’ll take her in. I hope she knows that.”

It occurred to Mary momentarily what life would

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be at Mount Misery with Eva living there as her step-daughter.

“Stroh would have been in time if he had followed her; he could have brought her back, and that is what he would have done if he had been a man,” Daniel said. “What about him now?”

“Hiding along the creek all day, Aunt Louisa told me. He hasn’t spoken a word, and looks wild.”

“I might have done a little more for Eva. I wish I had. She will lead an awful life at the mercy of that scoundrel. How can she have a moment’s peace?”

Seeing the slow moisture in his eyes, Mary said what she could.

“It can’t be kept from Helen,” he continued, in a few minutes. “I’ll go now, and get that over.”

Full of pity, Mary was also much surprised to see Daniel feeling so keenly and so outspoken about it; she forgot that he had seemed faintly suspicious the day before. That she herself was the object of his strong devotion — of that she did not want to think. She said to herself that it was beyond her to understand his feelings.

Day after day went by her without any break in her mental isolation. Nothing was heard of Eva, gone as completely as if she had been swallowed up. Christiana remained shut in at Yost’s. Occasionally Mary saw George moving about in the twilight, always alone, like someone haunted. He hid from everyone from morning until night, and when she

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looked up at his window she could be sure that he was lying there sodden, or in some lair by the water.

It was incomprehensible to her that with all their resources neither his mother nor Louisa offered him the least help. While Eva and he were over the way at the Crossed Keys, Mary had said little and given him gay smiles. Now the undercurrent which moved her was too strong. Something must be done, she decided. She did not know what in the world ought to be done; but if she talked with him some result would come of it.

To have decided on even one definite step made her hopeful. She waited only until the first pleasant afternoon to try her venture. Dressed very nicely, to give herself all the courage possible, she watched for George until dusk; and as soon as she discerned him on the road she set out quickly, and did not care who saw her. He was tramping along, his shoulders hunched, his head a little to one side.

Having caught up with him, she remarked, in a very clear voice, "I wish you wouldn't walk so fast."

Reluctantly, without looking at her, he went a little more slowly. He left her the footpath and kept to the middle of the road, his eyes on the ground; it was plain that nothing had any interest to him except his own thoughts. His clothing was soiled from lying about in the fields, and he appeared utterly neglected and deplorable. She regretted that her own dress was fresh and pretty; she was furious at everyone who might criticize him.

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“Will you show me how to play some new music?” she said, as she had planned to say. “It came yesterday. Parts of it are too hard for me.”

“I can’t play.”

“I’m sure you can play this. Come and show me now, won’t you?”

Her plan was to invite him to supper; she had her table set out for it with all her best things. Afterward, if it were necessary, she would put the proceeding in the right light to Louisa and to Daniel.

George made no answer at all.

She did not know what to say next; every subject she could think of was painful, she could not even talk about the choir. Walking composedly along beside him, she felt every moment more plainly that he wanted her to go elsewhere. Several times she looked sidewise in astonishment at him, so unkempt he was.

“George,” she said, quite indignantly, “Don’t give up.”

“I’m not giving up.”

“Won’t you go home?”

“No. I can’t.”

“Go away somewhere then. Don’t be like this; it is the worst thing in the world,” she said, with sweet eagerness.

“You must not worry about me, Mary.”

Of course he did not want her pity! She tried again: “You have your voice.”

“Not now.”

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“Has that gone too?” she thought.

“You had better not talk to me,” he said gently.

After waiting for her to say more if she wished he quietly went away. Mary walked on, crossed a field. Although the grass was cold and the wind was beginning to blow she sat down on a rock among some trees. There was nothing that she could do; and she felt so regretful and so futile that for a short time she would have been glad never to rise, to lay down her identity then and there, with all its impotence. He had not disgraced himself publicly, that he had not done, she said to herself — he who had been so superb.

Although Louisa from her own porch had seen Mary start out and catch up with George she kindly asked no questions. For Louisa these were empty days. The solitary woman had no one but her friends to depend upon for a share of the pleasantness of daily companionship; and now Daniel never was her guest, and of Christiana she saw nothing at all. She thought of them constantly. Then her patience very suddenly gave out. Too much was left to her, she said to herself; she could not have it so any longer, and Christiana must do her duty. This revolution in Louisa's feelings took place on the morning of election day. A great deal was going on at the Crossed Keys, with voters running in and out continually, but she left everything and drove over to Yost's. On the way she learned from one of Christiana's employes that Mrs. Stroh was not look-

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ing for a new head man. When she approached the house her eyes dwelt on the dignified gray front, and she reflected that for forty years she had been sure of a welcome there; the change which had come over everything was like the work of an evil spirit.

At first she had hopes that her visit would be like old times. Christiana was all alone in the sunny kitchen, full of the fragrance brought by every breeze from the cider-making; she was kneading bread, and she looked cheerful as she went at the dough with her skilful fists and occasionally gave it a toss into the air. Her welcome was warm, although she ignored so much, and with such politeness, that the welcomed one felt quite uncomfortable. Questions about the baby and about Mary were asked and answered; then there came a long halt. Louisa sat perfectly still, her eyes fixed upon a large pink begonia on the window-sill.

“Christiana,” she said. “I know it looked as if I didn’t sympathize with you when I took George in, and Eva; but I never meant it so.”

“Don’t think about it. I don’t.”

“Now I must tell you something; and I don’t want to do it.”

“What is that?”

“I can’t keep George at my house any longer.” Louisa made her statement in such a manner that it became a strong entreaty.

“I was never willing to have George there.”

“Since Eva deceived him — ”

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"I knew she would. It is no good to me, now, that she is gone."

Louisa was startled by Christiana's intense bitterness. "I'm meddling; but let me tell you how it is," she persisted, very gently. "George can't work. He stays in his room all day long, or hides in the meadows; I hear him at night walking the floor. He was so erect and handsome. Now the girls are afraid and laugh at him."

"I heard that he is silly with drink."

"I know what he has done to you — "

"Do you? "

"But he is your only child. Look at the practical side. You can't keep this up. Where can he go? If you don't take him in there will be no place but the poor-house."

"He left Yost's," Christiana answered, and went on kneading.

"You wouldn't bear a grudge against him. Won't you take care of him for Paul's sake? "

"Oh, let Paul rest! "

"Your own flesh and blood — "

"Our own flesh and blood wounds us deepest, Louisa."

"I would stand a good many such wounds to have a child of my own. Maybe George would not have chosen to come into the world."

"I wish he never had."

Louisa looked at Christiana as if she saw her undergoing a grotesque physical transformation. "I'll

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go," she responded. "Don't you blame Eva. She left her child in a good home."

Christiana said nothing at all. Louisa started out of the room, but stopped one last moment at the door.

"I couldn't leave you in ignorance."

"Louisa, don't go away like that."

"George's name is in my will. I'll spend some of that money for him now; I'll make him comfortable somewhere."

"No! You are not the one to do that!" Christiana exclaimed. Her hands lay flat on the breadboard; she leaned on them and stared downward for a couple of minutes. "I can't let him suffer."

"Oh, you poor girl, you poor girl!" Louisa thought. Walking quietly back, she touched Christiana lightly on the shoulder, and sat down again.

Louisa did not stay a great while, and nothing very practical was discussed; but when she started homeward she looked about her with a sense of blessed freedom and peace, as if she had been relieved from severe pain. The ploughed land and the stubble were wonderfully colored, apricot, bronze, rose; white clouds, frayed at the edges like silk, floated across the glowing blue sky; on the slopes of the Blue Mountain lay pools of forget-me-not and azure light, bright as precious stones. She asked nothing more, nothing at all except to gaze at the hills and watch the goldfinches flying up from the road-side, and say to herself that she had Christiana back.

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A considerable uproar, a long way off but coming nearer, caught her ear — shouts, horns blowing, banging on a tin pan. Louisa turned into the Blue Mountain road and looked to see what was going on; instantly she was alert to get back to business; she seized her whip and whipped her contemplative horse to make him cross the bridge first. She would not be a part of that procession.

“I knew Nick Siess would try to spite me on account of the polls. I hate that man,” she reflected, as she went bumping along.

The patrons of the Seven Stars, travelling in two hay-wagons, were on their way to vote at the rival establishment. The centre-piece in one wagon was a couple of kegs, around which the men sat where they could find room. In the other with a few intimate friends Nicholas rode, wearing a shady hat and reposing in his yellow arm-chair. Louisa's stony answer to his Good-day amused him. When they reached the Crossed Keys none of them paid any attention to her or spent a penny; they walked in, voted and walked out, and carried their supplies across a couple of fields to the creek.

The day was unseasonably warm; unexpected birds, transient visitors, peeped out of the shrubbery and flitted about. Between the greenish yellow leaves which still clung to the tops of the water-beeches the sunshine flooded down bright and hot, and there was such a languor in the air that the men were glad to throw themselves on the grass. Immedi-

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ately an open-air bar-room was started, with card-games, and cigar-boxes moved from hand to hand. Nicholas Siess sat by the kegs, with his back against a tree. Valentine's ankles made two bright spots on the turf. Joe had done a day's work in half a day so that he could join the party, and he now fell asleep in the shade of a bush. It seemed like Sunday. The voices sank to a peaceful murmur while political questions of vast scope were debated but not settled, and many stories were told.

Without noise a face came looking through Joe's bush, a foot or so above the ground. It gazed drowsily at the merry-makers; a long-thumbed hand groped its way between the twigs and twitched the sleeper's coat until he woke. Joe started to spring up, with a shock of disgust at this man lying along the water's edge like a log.

"Sh-h-h!" a deprecating voice said.

"George! Were you there all the time?"

"I was sleeping."

Joe immediately pretended to settle himself for another nap, so that no one should observe them, and the two lay there facing each other through the stems of the bush. Without desiring to speak George gazed across the green plain on which his cheek rested.

After a while Joe asked, "Will you come out and join the boys?"

"I don't want to see them. I'll get away down the bank in a minute."

"Look here. You come home with me."

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"I couldn't do that. I am going away. In a day or two I'll be shipped from here."

"I can't see you like this."

"I'll be all right. You are the best fellow I know."

All of a sudden a startling change came over George's face, as if he beheld something excruciating.

"What is it? What's wrong? Heavens! "

"Not what you think. I've had the horrors three or four times but not now. This is worse. Sometimes I see my wife right before me, in all her beauty, with her sweet ways. I want to touch her; and then I remember that she is spoiled. Those two met ghosts in the streets of Reading."

He rolled over on his face.

A little later Nicholas Siess, who took part in the festivities only to keep them up, sat blowing one smoke-ring through another very nicely and eying Valentine without interest. The short, gaudy figure in its progress along the water's edge reminded him of a jumping-jack: especially when it stopped short, uttered a scared noise and stood rigid. Nicholas was far-sighted; his eyes found what they searched for.

"Boys! "

"What's up? "

"Do you see George Stroh? What a come-down! "

Nearly all the men went sauntering over to the bushes; Joe saw them coming and sprang up. Feeling himself caught, George also got to his feet. He was confused and tried hard not to show it, and he

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succeeded in going to meet the crowd without staggering. He was well stared at as they returned to the kegs.

"He's all dirty," Valentine remarked.

"That was a long spree," murmured Billy Hinkle.

"Beer?" Nicholas greeted him, indifferently.

"No."

"Whiskey?"

"No."

"Have you money?" whispered Billy, who had been studying him. "I'll pay. You have stood me many a drink."

George felt delightfully warm in his throat. When Ambrose asked him to play cards he ventured it, although he was not sure that he could follow; but it went quite well, and Ambrose gave him two cigars. As the time passed, an hour and more, and no one hinted at his troubles, he enjoyed the game. He was busy dealing when he suddenly looked up. Nicholas, sitting lopsided three yards off, had begun to watch him with relish. George felt himself slipping, he felt his wits grow more and more hazy; he feared that when the insults came he would not be able to understand what was said to him.

"Have a drink?" asked Nicholas, pleasantly.

George shook his head; unable to think of anything to say, he kept quiet.

"Won't cost you anything if you sing us a song."

"I can't. I can't sing."

"Well, take it anyhow."

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Nicholas poured a quantity of whiskey into a tin cup and George drank it. After ten minutes or so the cup was handed to him again.

"No, I suppose you couldn't sing," Nicholas said, seriously.

"I might sing."

"That will be a treat."

Every face turned toward George, smiling and encouraging. He looked gravely from one to another as he made a great effort to recall any song, the beginning of anything whatever; but nothing would come. He strained to remember; small black words danced before him, melodies in his head undulated like gauzy rags. When at last he caught hold of one he burst out at once:

"Praise ye the Lord! "

"Be quiet! " Joe commanded.

George glared at him. "Praise ye the Lord! " he repeated, with such an effort that it raised his shoulders; and on he went through the first stanza of the Whitsunday hymn. Not much was left of the rich voice; it was a shout, broken by piercing, vinegary notes; he could scarcely believe that the forlorn sounds came from his throat. Through the laughter and derisive clapping he sat mute. His eyes fixed on Nicholas, and he thought, "I forgot that Siess is my enemy."

The conviction crept into his mind that Nicholas had discovered the truth about Paul Stroh, smelling it out like a wolf. He himself was a ridiculous, fooled

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husband, as everybody knew; and these friends of his had seized upon the story about his mother. All his wounds were known to the whole world. Feeling that he must get away somewhere and hide, he sat still where he was, because wherever he went Eva would come out smiling.

"I should hate the fellow even if Flossy had not had her crying spells," Nicholas reflected, staring at him. "Here's your drink, a good big one, because you sang," he said. "Your father-in-law has taken up with the daughter of old Shell, the old tramp, hasn't he?"

"I am being sickened at everything I ever had," George thought, feeling pierced by that pair of eyes.

"You are paying a long visit to the elderly lady at the Crossed Keys, aren't you? If she gets tired of it maybe I can make a job for you," Nicholas continued. "I wouldn't see you left in the dark about what was going on right across the creek — no! It's too bad that your wife also took a liking to Gartman's figure."

"Shut up!" Ambrose said, thrusting his frowning face forward. "You can't fool me any longer with that first story."

George succeeded in raising himself to his feet; he reeled toward Nicholas and struck hard at him. Overbalanced by his own blow, he fell against a tree, face first. When Joe lifted him there was a red cut across his lips, and he got rid of a quantity of red froth; he looked like a painted clown.

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“ Good! That will spoil his mouth for a month,” Nicholas thought. “ Why, George! ” he said, laughing and offering a little more whiskey. “ You’re the brave boy. Nobody could make you peep.”

All the onlookers were startled, and no one cared to speak. George began to feel very much afraid. His dread was that Nicholas, after all this mockery, would go on to utter some horrible taunt that would stick to him and brand him. He must not lay himself open in any way, he must assert himself and be equal to everything that came up, or he would be tormented and become the neighborhood butt. This filled his foggy mind.

An effeminate kind of half-oath came from Valentine, who had slapped a mosquito and now stood scowling at his cuff. Great numbers of mosquitoes were about; the digging of a new canal near Middleport had brought them out in swarms, the protracted sultry weather kept them alive, and they were rapacious.

“ You don’t mind them, do you, George? ” asked Nicholas.

“ Mind what? ” George had apprehended that they were not real. “ Oh, those? I don’t notice them. I could stand them any length of time.”

“ No, you couldn’t,” Valentine snapped. “ There’s one on your cheek now. It’ll bite you.”

“ Don’t you call me a liar! I’ll take an affidavit to it. For a little bit of a mosquito — ! ”

“ I’ll bet with you,” Nicholas said. “ Bet you five

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dollars you can't lie here stripped without moving for fifteen minutes."

"Yes, I can. I don't want you to talk to me about anything at all."

"But you won't bet? "

"Yes, I will."

"Go ahead then." Nicholas did not require that the money should be put up. "The whiskey chatters," he whispered to Billy.

George rose, pompously; both Joe and Ambrose tried hard to stop him, but he commanded them not to interfere. He took off his few clothes, and laid himself down flat in the sun.

"Now," said Nicholas. "Fifteen minutes without moving, no matter how they bite. If you turn over on your back it will cost you five dollars. Here, before we begin, lift your head."

After he had drunk gratefully George subsided and buried his face in his arms, feeling contented and listless. His skin turned blue, and the mosquitoes gathered and began to drain him, but he shivered and twitched and lay still. The men sat around him, joking and making side-bets while they kept their eyes on the watch which lay open on Nicholas's knee. Ten minutes passed, during which Nicholas smoked and reclined in absolute inertia. Then he took his cigar out of his mouth, made a gesture with it which caught everyone's attention, and held the burning end against George's shoulder. All the lusty faces grinned. Joe's was the only one that did not beam,

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and when he tried to protest the landlord laid a hand on his mouth. The smokers eagerly took up the sport. The victim winced; as the red spots on his body became more numerous he moaned a little, and pressed his face against the ground. It was Valentine's cigarette, daintily applied to the sensitive flesh behind one knee, from which he could not help jerking away.

"I can stand the mosquitoes but not the damned horse-flies."

There was an outbreak of loud laughter. Nicholas announced, in a business-like way, "A minute and a half short." Some of the men jeered, some seemed disgusted; the laughter was slow to stop. "Go back! Look out!" shouted Joe, in the midst of it.

While the crowd was becoming embarrassed and excited George sat still with his eye-lids falling over his eyes. Christiana came steadily across the meadow; and at a sign from Nicholas they all turned and walked off except old Billy. He blushed and assisted her with the helpless man.

"Come, George. Come, dear."

She put her arm around him for a support, and they went slowly away, his head hanging down against hers.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEGINNING to wake, George felt as if he were rising through still, black water. Although he opened his eyes wide he saw nothing, for it was intensely dark; and his senses seemed muffled. Very little life remained in him. "I can't move. I can't keep awake," he thought. He sank to sleep again, and had another struggle upward before he came to himself.

"Where am I?"

Not a sound from anywhere; the air was clammy, and he was cold through and through; the silent darkness felt heavy, pressing down and burying him. In great fear he began to grope; his fingers touched a wall, moved slowly along the back of a sofa and the edge of a picture-frame. He listened hard and heard a murmur which gradually became recognizable as the Northkill. What strength he had went out of him when he knew that he was at home.

Chills kept running over him; his burns smarted; he felt very sick and wretched, and had a hammering pain in his head, which grew worse and worse, as if he were to have it forever. He longed for someone to be with him, but did not expect anyone for hours; he would have liked to groan. After a while he

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partly recalled what had gone on in the meadow, that his friends from the Seven Stars had burned him on purpose, and that he had been a fool, such a fool.

There was someone moving in the silent house; a quiet step drew nearer, and as the door opened a little yellow light appeared. Christiana came in, carrying a lantern, and wearing a flowing white night-dress in which she looked stately and chaste. Softly she approached. After observing George she sat down near him and rested her head on her hand. He watched her through his eye-lashes, and lay quite motionless, fearing that she might speak to him. Presently he began to feel that he could not endure what she was thinking: she knew all about him; and here she would always be, she would never be far away, here at Yost's, where old letters lay about and stale old gifts. Before long Christiana lifted her head, rose, and opened a window with patient caution. In rolled the misty air, and he could smell the dawn. As she left the room he felt her backward glance.

“I can't stay here.”

The pain in his head pounded.

“Where are you, Eva? Why isn't she with me? — I don't want to touch her now. A girl in the street is better, she tells you what she is. — She had very rich hair.”

With a rushing sound from far off the wind swept by; the lantern-flame leaped and smoked. Suddenly he saw her, not as he had imagined her many times before, disgraced and happy, with all her charms.

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This was another vision. Thick, confused darkness seemed first to waver and undulate before him; what succeeded was not light but cold, stormy twilight; dusky clouds were piling up across the firmament of a strange region floored with clouds, a vast, obscure space where the winds sighed. As if drifting with the air, along no path, for there was neither path nor foothold, she passed by him, a shadow with craving mouth and sad eyes.

"Eva is dead. Now she will want me. Let me catch up with her."

He could hardly stand on his feet, but he staggered ahead and dragged himself out of the house. The air was pungent, and there was the loud sound of a bird's flight through the leaves. Though he looked north and south he scarcely knew that the bare fields were around him. At last he found himself before the barn door. With all the will-power that remained to him he kept on, hunting half blindly about the barn until he found what he required. He propped himself against the ladder in the feed-entry, and arranged the halter around his neck.

"Now! "

One long step forward off the ladder was followed by sensations of being violently uprooted, and seemingly the band of light through the half-open doorway wound itself round and round him with a great roaring. Then he struck the floor.

The horses looked at him restlessly. When he opened his eyes one end of the torn rope was hanging

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on his breast, the other dangled overhead. In great pain from a fractured wrist and leg, he tried to move and gave it up. He could see the red dawn of a day of bad weather; and a pigeon on the ridge-pole was softly repeating, "Look at the fo-o-ool! Look at the fo-o-ool! "

CHAPTER XXIV

TIME scarcely moved; sometimes the minutes as they passed seemed almost as tangible to George as grains of sand drifting against his body. He longed to become unconscious again: it was the same old world. He lay in apathy, so exhausted that he could not dwell upon anything and had to let his thoughts slip away after a moment. A storm went on during those days; the wind raced and screamed among the hills; then clear weather came, and winter. It was good to lie at home while bare branches shook outside the windows. Gradually the pain of his broken bones grew less; the splinted arm and leg made stiff ridges under the silk quilt, in which there was a good deal of red.

Surprised to be alive, he felt like a stranger to himself. His sunny room looked strange, for a clean sweep had been made of every little thing of Eva's; and Christiana had become quite an unfamiliar person. Just before he lost consciousness in the barn she had rushed in and hidden the rope. Since then everything he could want had been provided, with a kind air. In her goodness to him all his life she had been quite selfless, and now she sat by the window darning linen and was pleasant; the very vigor of her movements

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as she took care of him brought it home to him that he could not move. When he watched her with the baby in her arms he knew that he had a great deal to decide; but he had to wait for all that.

Freddy spent hours on his father's bed every day. On a bleak Sunday afternoon in November the two entertained each other with a woolly toy for a long while, until the baby quieted down and was carried away fast asleep. Lying there alone in the warmth, George looked at a metallic red spot of sunshine on the wall, at the witch-hazel twigs with yellow blossoms in a copper lustre pitcher, and at the gray sky. He wanted to be out of bed; soon he would be ready to face the weather. He said to himself that now he would make up his mind what to do; he had put it off long enough.

He set himself to reckon things as they were, and to make plans, which had to be flexible enough to fit in with the passionate determinations of several other people. Some kind of practical understanding he must have with his mother, if only for the boy's sake. Her attitude toward Beneval could wait. His father — that light was out. The world he lived in had come to an end, and he would learn to live again.

“Eva is with Gartman, and I don't know where.”

This realization time and time again had sent him wandering among the meadows beyond the Crossed Keys.

“My girl! My girl! What shall I do without her?”

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One expression after another of her beloved face recurred to him, one after another little, intimate charm; and at the same time he knew that he was forgotten.

“ They are together, — happy! ”

It was dreadful to be unable to reach Beneval with his hands. He was burning hot and dry with rage; his mind heaved with unbearable imaginings; he would have given everything he had for indifference.

He thought of whiskey; it was a sudden thing. Drinking had been only a means of merry-making to him until he had recourse to it in his fury and despair. Now it seemed that some inward part of himself acquired an independent will, stirred, grew restless and threatening. He needed the warmth in his throat and the cheerful languor and the heavenly forgetfulness.

If he rang his bell and demanded what he wanted it would most likely not be brought. His mother always kept a supply for emergencies; he had seen it in a corner of her bed-room closet any number of times. Though he had no crutches he could get there nicely by holding on to a chair and pushing it along. Back among the pillows, how he would feel! If she had taken it away he would hate her.

As he sat up his head turned, but he was reaching for the chair when another idea presented itself: that a crippled man crossing the floor in that fashion, in night-clothing, striking monkey-like attitudes, with a quart bottle under his bandaged arm, was a perfectly

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ridiculous spectacle. He could see it. While he was thinking about it an unconscious movement sent a pain straight through his broken leg. With his mouth pursed he looked down the silken ridge and reflected that the fractures would have to be reset, and that everybody in Middleport would know why. The jeers of his old followers in the meadow, which he could not forget, sounded in his ears. He laid himself down in the bed.

“ I never felt like this about a drink. I shall never be better able to quit than I am now. If I had been half a man I'd have had no time for whiskey that morning when I heard that she was gone.

“ Can't I stop thinking? ”

Absolute blankness of mind for a while would have been the greatest blessing he could ask, but it was impossible not to think of Eva. The craving enemy within him had grown gigantic; with no hope of mastering it he held on to the idea that he must not give in. A numb, half-dead sensation spread all through him. A little drink now, and not only would this misery end but he would be well and everything would be easy.

“ No, I won't! Oh, I am sick of myself, but this shan't get the better of me! ”

He was so exhausted that he could hardly breathe. Though he did not lose consciousness he felt himself sinking into darkness, which closed around him as he went farther and farther down. It was endless blackness; he could not climb back, he might stay there

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forever, wandering about. Help he must have, help from somewhere, if he were to live.

He lay still for a long while, with his arm across his face. The copper lustre pitcher was faintly shining through twilight when he opened his eyes and drew himself into his usual position because he heard Christiana coming. At first she seemed unreal. She had an armful of his belongings from the Crossed Keys, and she began to put them away; it took her a moment to decide where the old Saint Augustine should go.

“Mother.”

She went over to the bed.

“Is there any whiskey in your closet?”

“No.”

Her voice was placid, but slight signs of excitement appeared in her face: she had been apprehending dreadful scenes, and feared one now.

“I don’t want it,” he declared, turning away from her and settling his head in the pillow.

That was a peaceful hour; but before long he found out that what he had to fight was the most unescapable thing in the world. It might creep on him at any moment; whenever he drifted into a jealous mood his thirst raged. Many a time he fell back into the dark place.

Christmas passed, and New Year, and no news of Eva came to Yost’s, and no change at all took place there. As George’s strength slowly increased he became almost wild to get out; he wanted to guide a

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horse again, and to go where he liked; but although the weather was remarkably mild nearly all of January had slipped by before he was allowed any freedom. When at last he actually stepped into his buggy there was his crutch packed among the buffalo-robies because he might need it; but the winding road was before him, and he drove away feeling as if he could fly.

The sky was almost as blue as in summer, and the hills covered with bare woods seemed austere. The distances appeared much greater than usual. Well as he knew the road, all the landmarks, the groups of trees and the windings of a slender stream, had an unfamiliar look. There was a sweet rustle of wind through dry corn-stalks; each willow-tree was surrounded by a net-work of orange-colored withes, and the briars had bright violet stems. As he saw the clear fields and the green winter wheat he longed to be at work again on the land.

He was also eager to encounter all the smiling contempt of the neighbors. As he greeted one acquaintance after another he kept looking for it; and he had a great surprise when they all showed more or less satisfaction at seeing him. He was slow to grasp that he was not regarded as tragic or absurd or very unusual in any way, and that his affairs were last year's news. Ambrose was so anxious to shake hands that he backed his horse with considerable trouble, and he was full of inquiries. While answering them George noticed how tired and old his friend looked; he did not remember that Ambrose was like that.

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Other men whom he saw hard at work near their barns, and women stepping about on the porches, all had the same worn appearance. He perceived this for the first time: it was as though a special kind of light-ray, which brought out every mark of care, were turned on all these familiar faces. When he drove past the Crossed Keys he thought how clean and solid it was, standing there in the sunshine; he glanced up at the windows of the room which had been his. At the schoolhouse recess was going on; children were running and playing, and their woollen caps made bright red, green and blue spots bobbing about in the road. Hands waved to George as he went by, and he discerned the two small boys who had believed in the pretzel-tree, and saw that one of them had his arm in a sling.

"The little chap has cracked a bone too," he thought.

Not far ahead a woman in a purple hood moved along the road as if she had no interest in her destination. She turned to gaze at him when he passed, and she was Flossy. After talking with her a few minutes he knew from the expression of her eyes that she was always thinking about something she dreaded and could not understand. She pointed out the farm where her mother-in-law lived, and her own small house two fields away. When he asked what she carried under her shawl she answered that it was her baby. Rather reluctantly she opened the wrappings and let him see a very little, wasted child with a gray

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face almost lost among cap-ruffles.

"Poor Flossy! Poor girl!" he said to himself over and over as he drove on.

The soft air began to feel cold, but he was not ready to go home; he wanted to be close to the hills, quite alone. A narrow wood-road with young cedars along the fences invited him, and he turned in and went upward gradually along the side of the Blue Mountain. It was much colder here; patches of white remaining from the snow-fall of December lay against the rocks. Dry leaves covered the ground, which was thawing, and many brown weeds still stood in their places and held up empty seed-vessels with the pale sunlight falling on them. Except a few green hemlocks all the trees were gray and bare; they crowded close together on every side, and between them the far distances appeared in a pearl-colored atmosphere. The silence was profound. Light clouds slowly mounted the sky. A crow flying westward, the only living thing in sight, seemed to be just under them.

He was glad to see a cheerful flock of juncos fly up, and glad to go toward home. As he came to the last curve in the wood-road he heard explosive barking and saw Frogen among the bushes. The enthusiastic dog had located an escaping something, and he was pursuing it, and while he dug and barked he lost two seconds recognizing the horse and George. Then Mary in her black clothes came around the curve, and stood still among the iron-gray trunks with

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pearl-gray air back of her.

"What are you doing away up here?" George called out.

"Taking a walk. I didn't expect to come so far."

"May I drive you home? I wish you a happy New Year. How are you, Mary?"

He had an impression that she shrank, but it was only momentary; she was smiling as she took the seat beside him. After inquiring how he was, and Christiana and the baby, she gave him the news of Middleport, beginning with Louisa, who had gone to Reading to stay two days and buy a good horse if she could find one.

"Mary, what have you been doing this winter?"

"Oh, all sorts of things."

How many dresses she had made for customers, how many yards of lace she had crocheted, and that she had pieced one quilt and begun another,—she told him all about it. So much vivacity repelled him; cheerful though she was, he found her cool as frost. He thought how lovely her eyes were; and how earnestly she had regarded him the last time they met, when he had repulsed her.

"What's that you're carrying?" he asked.

"A cocoon." She held out a long twig with what looked like a brittle, gray pod for him to see. "I'll take it home and put it up over the clock; perhaps the warmth of the house will bring out the butterfly before spring. There was a robin in my garden this morning, but he may be wintering here. When I see

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the pussy-willows I shall be so glad."

She indeed gave him something to overcome. It was clear enough to him now that she was thoroughly alienated and trying to hide it; but in spite of that he was eager to let her know how much he valued her.

"And when spring comes your wedding-day comes. I hope you will be very happy, Mary."

Gazing into the woods on her side, she answered, "I think we'll be happy."

"I'm glad I met you," she said, presently, with her usual gentleness. "I meant to write to you. Will you be at church on Sunday?"

"Why do you suggest that?"

"You ought to take your old place at the organ and train the singers. I can't do it properly. I can't play well enough; and they quarrel a great deal. I am afraid the whole choir will go to pieces."

"They wouldn't want me."

"Everybody would be glad."

"I have no voice. It is gone."

"It will return."

That voice must return, she thought. She began to feel now that this thin, pale man was her old friend himself, though he had gained a different poise by going through awful things.

"I don't believe I shall ever get back to music," he said.

"It's waiting for you."

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“She thinks I could sing again; she thinks that possible,” he thought.

He felt as though he were lost in the dusk and saw dimly a road which was probably the right one. Nothing more was said. When they reached her house Mary left the carriage very quickly so that he should not make the effort to help her. She called from the door-step, “Don’t disappoint us on Sunday.”

While he watched her unlock and open the door, with Frogen pushing in ahead, George noticed how still and lonely the place was, as if everything that went on there had come to an end.

“Dear little soul!” he said to himself. “She deserves better than Mount Misery.”

When he reached home he could do nothing but throw himself on his bed and lie there flat and motionless. He had the sensation that he was still driving. He remembered one view after another of the wood-road, all scarred, naked trees and broken stones. The friendly faces came back to him, Mary’s too, with their different records of care. There was a great deal to do in the world, it seemed; he would not live an invalid’s life another day. That very evening he came walking down-stairs and into the sitting-room without a crutch.

“Mother,” he said, eagerly.

Christiana sat in her usual chair, with a box of gay silk patches beside her, knitting away at a luxurious rug like Mary’s. She fastened in a ruby-colored strip, and looked up.

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“What is it?”

“I am well now. I want to settle things, and get to work.”

Without replying Christiana selected more strips, gray and blue. George knew well enough that there was no telling what would happen to the frail peace between them. After a short wait he went on.

“I want to know whether you will take charge of the boy; and I hope you will employ me again as manager.”

“I took the boy when he was handed over to me,” Christiana said, calmly. “You are on your feet now.”

“Don’t you want us?”

“What will become of the child if I don’t want him? But if I consent to take care of him and bring him up he shall not be carried off for anybody’s whim.”

“I am so anxious to have him grow up here that I will sign whatever you like.”

“Very well. As to employing you, George, I expect to be competent to run the place for some time; and I don’t know how far I could depend on you.”

“Do you mean the drinking? I hope you know I would never do that again.” Even while he was speaking he remembered the frantic longings against which he had defended himself by childish prayers. “Can I really be sure?” he thought.

Christiana knitted a while. Then, with a direct

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look, she said, "I will never again live with anyone who is repulsive to me."

She left him an opportunity to speak, which he did not take.

"I know that happiness is of very little importance because it is distributed so carelessly; and I can do without it. To be left in peace, however, I do expect. Perhaps I shall be lonely. I am not afraid of loneliness. Sometimes I think that solitude surrounds every soul, always, to protect it, like glass around something beautiful."

"I understand." He paused because it took time to understand that his mother was ready to be rid of him and was dismissing him. "Never fear, you will probably not see Eva again."

"If that is so I shall be more than glad to have you here, George."

"Would you like to know what I am going to do? I mean to find her; I'll pay what it costs. She wanted a little pleasure, a few pretty things; that was innocent. If she leaves Gartman I'll give her some help; if they want to marry I'll do all I can."

"It looks to me as though you would soon take her back," Christiana remarked; and she continued, to herself, "That woman will pretend to want the baby, and she will come here. George will be led by her to do anything. There will be no peace for him or me."

While he watched his mother's hands moving incessantly with the silks he thought of Eva's satisfying

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loveliness, and that now there was no place where kisses waited for him.

He said, "I will not take her back."

"You don't expect Beneval to marry her?"

George turned his head away. He felt able to do what he had planned, but not to discuss it.

"I see!" Christiana exclaimed. "It would be a satisfaction to you to meet him with your fists or with a horsewhip, and to send him to jail afterwards. Don't do it! Beneval has been a victim like the rest of us. Now let the old grudge die."

So her sympathies were there, George thought, with utter repulsion. "I'll not go until I have all my strength back," he answered lightly.

"Do you intend to stay here?"

"Yes, for the present. We'll speak of that again. Good-night. Mother, have you that picture of my father?"

By the time she had opened the secretary and the inner drawer and had taken out the black daguerreotype-case Christiana's face had grown so steady in endurance that it was almost stiff. He looked at her closely, for he felt that he had never really seen her. As though the clear light in which he had read the neighbors' faces now fell suddenly upon her, he perceived that her face was all marked and altered by persistent pain. He noticed that her fingers shrank from the picture as she gave it to him.

Slowly he made his way up to his room; he found it quite cold, and he wrapped himself in a fur coat

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before he sat down in the dark. It was a strange thing to be certain that he had never known his mother. He had blamed her and had taken her as a matter of course, but he had not tried to understand her life, and he had sided against her always. Now he felt that he must get at the truth; sleep would not rest him until he had done her justice. He tried hard to discern among prejudices and palliations the facts in the case between Paul and Christiana Stroh, and to see them from her point of view. But he could not keep a clear head when he thought of her attachment to Beneval; his detestation of Beneval confused him like a poison.

To relieve his mind from it he lighted a lamp and held the faded likeness in the glow. How could that man with such a sensitive and candid face endure debasement, he wondered. He became certain that both his father and his mother had cherished their own sincerities, if only he could comprehend them. He recalled carefully what he knew about his father's history: that he was poor, that he had come to this church from another state, that none of his relatives had ever been at Yost's. George brought out the old volume of Saint Augustine, and sat down again with it and the picture in his hands. The frail relics were all he had to help him get at the truth, except what he could learn from his own heart. He had never examined the book; to touch it repelled him; he had glanced over a chapter or two, locked in his room at the Crossed Keys, consciously grotesque, with his

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bottle beside him. Now he began to look through it, and to follow up the marked passages.

“Reviewing my most wicked ways in the very bitterness of my remembrance. — And what was it that I delighted in but to love and be beloved? — The invisible enemy trod me down. — There is an attractiveness in beautiful bodies. — The life also whereby we live hath its own enchantments, through a certain proportion of its own. — I hate to think on it, to look on it.”

These fragments occurred in the course of a few pages, and were bracketed so clearly that reading them without the context was like making out a very simple cipher. George discovered one after another with increasing excitement. It was plain enough why those sentences were marked: they had heartened a man who, as often as he was overcome by a hated propensity, went fighting on; in the isolation of his remorse they gave him a feeling of companionship. Time and again George followed the other mind over its shadowy trail. Paul Stroh's judgment of himself was here, his explanation, his shamed pleas and the final loathing. He told them in the words of a prince among the saints in glory.

Had that been all for the poor fellow, George wondered. Had he stayed in those depths until the end came, or had he found some hope of his own? Many pages were turned before the next bracket appeared: “who abidest, and recallest, and forgivest the adulterous soul of man, when he returns to Thee.” In his

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eagerness to get at the reality of his father's life which seemingly had all been false, this was an assurance to George; and there were many more following it, of the same drift. On the last fly-leaf some lines were written: "Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, even the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

George put the book aside.

"What a life for a man! Trying to renounce, and always ending in 'I cannot'; knowing he had done wrong and would do it again; dreading discovery, lonesome, preaching on Sunday. When Mother was the princess of this neighborhood why was that forlorn girl thrown in his way? A prosperous beauty would not have touched him. What accurate cruelty there was in that chance! An enemy searching for ways to bring him down into the mud could not have done it better."

It had not been a trivial fate; it had become involved among primary laws which in this instance ran counter to each other. Apprehending this, George felt a faint return of pride. His mood underwent a change, as unobtrusive as if with the progress of the sun a shadow gently changed its place and no longer fell across him. He said to himself that all that was done for and far in the past.

Now the urgent thing was to find out why his mother took Beneval's part. It was impossible to accept that quietly and stay at Yost's. He must have excellent reasons or he must leave her; but any question he

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might put to her would be an insult, and there was no other way for him to get the truth. He suspected that a cleverer person than himself would make out a strong case for her on the evidence; but he could not, he had not mind enough. When he realized that fact it seemed that all the defenses of his individuality were broken; he felt utterly incompetent and futile; he hardly knew himself, there was so little of him.

He began to walk about his room, opened a window and looked out. It was a mild night; above the mountains the stars glittered in great depths of black.

God was out there among the scarred mountains. It was reasonable that it should be so. There must be strength somewhere because he himself was so weak; and surely God would rather be among those beloved mountains than in other places. A sort of dazzled peace came over him.

Wandering back and forth, he found himself before the mirror, and gazed aimlessly. His frame of mind was so exalted that he was ready to believe in a mystical sanction for almost any new, sudden idea. Now a possible explanation of his mother's actions occurred to him, which if it were correct would illuminate everything. He could not from the indefinite impressions of childhood recall his father's face very clearly. He seized the daguerreotype and studied it; he moved the lamp, and looked down and up from the picture to the likeness in the glass. Not

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he, broad-featured like the Yosts, but Beneval, with the long profile, drooping moustache and heavy-lidded eyes, was like their father.

So when her own son deserted her Christiana had turned to the one who resembled the love of her youth. George used his knowledge of women to estimate this; he recalled her expression when she laid her hand on Beneval's shoulder. Then she had not been a tyrant to her husband; she had dearly loved him. The idea of that smouldering devotion appealed to George like music. When he thought of her building the fire on the funeral-night, he knew, as he had known before Beneval came between them, that that was an act of wild mourning.

He had been altogether sure that she refused a divorce at the promptings of selfish pride. Now for the first time he questioned what would have happened if she had consented; she would have seen her son burdened for the rest of his life and the whole neighborhood injured by such a scandal about the preacher at Yost's Church. She had shielded her husband, she had protected them all. No doubt she knew that he had not long to live. Having learned a melancholy contempt for passion, she had thrown away her wedding-ring, and perhaps her vindictive memory went with it; perhaps, after freeing herself so, she had taken back to her heart its ideal.

George felt satisfied that now he had the truth: his mother was a heroine of the type he most admired; he dwelt upon this as though he were looking at a

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treasure. The mirror gleamed; he heard an uncertain growl from the watch-dog wandering out in the star-light. After a while something in the wall began to tick, and there was a rustling and cracking when the wind blew through the garret. Generations of his forebears had listened to those sounds; they were the voices of the house, which no doubt had had very different thrills when Paul Stroh was carried out and when the owners passed away. As he thought how far he himself had departed from the Yosts' way of life he felt constrained to get back.

“How can I ask Mother's pardon for turning against her, and for such suspicions as I can't mention? How can she bear the sight of me?”

He went out into the hall and saw that the lamp was burning in the sitting-room though it was quite late. What could be done he wanted to do at once; he went downstairs fast for a man who had recently had broken bones. Christiana was really alarmed when she heard his steps, and turned toward him apprehensively without speaking. Her mood had for a long while been one of immobile sadness.

It almost stopped him to find her so calm; he wondered that she still looked at anybody with benignant eyes; he was utterly without idea what to say, as he stood before her.

“Mother, I am very sorry.”

His impulse to do what he could brought forth that; but he felt so regretful, he admired her so much, to set matters right was so impossible, that he could get no

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farther. Christiana regarded him for a minute, dumb and still before her.

“Are you?”

She laid her knitting by, and her capable hand moved smoothly to a caress as he threw himself down beside her.

That night passed in deep peace; the next day George felt elated. Not until after dark did he really think of Eva. He imagined her all by herself, tired out, walking long, muddy streets at night, under foggy lights.

“Wasn’t I as good a man as he? Oh, Eva, won’t you give me a thought?”

CHAPTER XXV

MARY and Daniel both noticed that it was rapidly growing dark; unconsciously they stopped talking. In the pause a continuous rushing noise from outside sounded stronger and stronger until the room was full of it. Mary went to the window and listened, with the last of the gray day-light falling over her; and Dan thought how graceful she was, and how her youthful dignity became her.

“You promised for this spring,” he said.

She did not answer; she seemed fascinated by the loud sound.

“You know how long I’ve waited. When will you come?”

“Some time after Easter.”

“That will be —.”

“Not until the end of April. I’ll show you; and after tomorrow there is another Sunday in March.”

She lit a candle and fetched her prayer-book for him to see the table of dates on which Easter falls.

“Then you don’t want to decide on the day?” he said, watching her across the candle-flame.

“Easter evening will be a good time to talk about that.”

The light was not of much use where she placed it

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at the other end of the room. She went back to the window, and Dan could see only her profile against the dusk.

"I never heard the creek so loud," she said. "It makes me think of the tone of the organ when I come along the road late to church."

"The Northkill is higher than it has been in years. Since the ground-hog saw his shadow we have had more than enough snow for a whole winter; and the mild days this week have turned it all to water."

From his tone she knew that he was permitting her to put him off, but not for long. "The snow went so quickly," she hastened to say. "On Thursday there were still drifts in that field over there. Yesterday the green winter wheat looked through the white, and I saw the brown earth this morning. The road to Yost's must be flooded.

"How are they getting along at Yost's? "

"Nicely. Aunt Christiana is well and Freddy is growing."

"How about his father? "

"He works hard, Aunt Louisa says; and he has been in his place in the choir twice. He plays, but doesn't use his voice much.

"You aren't going? I wanted you to spend the evening."

"I think I'll start. Sylvester is away tonight; Helen is alone. I believe that by this time that little rivulet of ours has carried away our bridge. To go to the post-office and then get home by the road on the

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other side of the hill will take me a while."

Mary went with him to the door, and they stood and listened in amazement to the tumult of the water. From her house, ordinarily, nothing could be seen of the Northkill except the trees and undergrowth along its winding course, but now they discerned through the dusk a gleaming surface. High-water mark had been passed in Louisa's meadow; the stream had grown into a river. They heard it beating against the rocks, and the splash of many small waves, and grinding noises when pieces of ice were washed against each other or struck and scraped the trees. All could be distinguished in the rushing and moaning sound. In the other direction there went on an incessant patter and ripple. The springs were swollen full, the streamlets leaped down the mountain-side.

As she listened Mary's eyes brightened wonderfully. Dan thought her beautiful.

"Not afraid, are you? "

"No, I'm not afraid. This happens every spring; the creek may be back between its own banks by tomorrow," she answered, in a joyous voice, as she scanned the clouds. Then she gazed at him as if there were no break in her thoughts. "Dan, all this time you have gone to the post-office every day, no matter what the weather or how busy you were. What do you expect in a letter? "

"It's too damp for you to stand here."

"The air is almost warm. I want to breathe it."

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Dan brought out a shawl and wrapped it around her head and throat.

"Now tell me," she said.

"I want to know where Eva is. Making her own way perhaps. Sylvester thinks so. I hope only that she may have left Gartman; but there is no one to take care of her."

"That is a bitter sort of hope to have about his daughter," Mary said to herself.

"At first I thought that if she came back I would let her stay," Dan continued.

"You haven't changed your mind on my account?"

"Certainly I wouldn't ask you to live with her, I wouldn't allow it; but if you were never to be there it would be the same. I am thinking of Helen."

"I believe Eva has left him."

"She was not happy at home, nor with Stroh; and she craves happiness," Dan replied, sorrowfully. "Mary is not much older than Eva; and what can I expect of her!" he reflected. He said, "Mary, it's a shame to tie you to this."

When he rode off she looked after him until he had disappeared. She wanted to act: she hated to go in and shut herself away from the free water and the wild clouds. The house was dark and very quiet, and Frogen came plodding along close to her feet as she went back to the window. There she sat a while, with her eyes fixed on the lights at the Crossed Keys. Now the water seemed to be singing praises.

"I was miserable when Father tramped about the

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country half drunk," she thought. "How must Dan feel? I wish marriage were not so long. What can I do for Dan? I don't know what to try to do for any of them."

Across the road Louisa's hostler whistled a tune as he waited for the stage; and when the horses trotted into view around the curve Louisa herself came out on the porch. There was a crowd of passengers. The driver got down from his high seat and assisted the women — a party of four, and another. Mary rose with a spring, and Frogen scrambled up to protect her.

It was certainly Eva, rather nicely dressed. She walked directly to Louisa, who stood motionless watching her. The two exchanged a few words, then went together into the house.

"Now what will happen?" Mary said aloud, rather breathless as one probable outcome after another rapidly occurred to her.

They had occurred to Eva over and over again on her way to Middleport, but all that was far back in her mind at this important moment. She followed Louisa into the parlor, where the dance had been held. It was warm, and when the lamp was lighted a great many roses suddenly appeared, on the carpet and the gay new wall-paper and the cushioned rocking-chairs. Eva looked about the room, and Louisa scrutinized her while waiting for her to speak. Although she was very thin she seemed to have plenty of energy, and moved lightly in her stylish shoes.

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She had made the most of her curly hair, puffing it out under her hat; her face had become oddly immobile; her expression was tranquil.

"I suppose you're surprised," she said. "Is my baby well?"

"Your baby is beautiful."

"Is he at Yost's?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is my father married?"

"They will be married some time this spring."

When she turned homeward Eva had been very conscious that she knew none of the facts which were most important to her; she needed a moment or two now to get the full significance of what she had been told.

"I will go to Yost's first," she said. "I'd like to hire your horse."

"You must not try to go to Yost's; the creek is too high. Don't you hear it?"

"I'll get there. Oh, how clean and nice this room looks!"

"I doubt whether you could drive across the bridge. Didn't you see anything of the flood on your way here?"

"Yes. How are they all? How is my sister Helen?"

"All well. Won't you sit down?"

Seating herself on the edge of a chair, Eva looked expectantly at Louisa, who returned the look without aversion.

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“Are you here alone?”

“Yes.”

“She has courage enough to answer that without explanation,” thought Louisa. “Why did you come?” she asked.

“I am looking for work. You don’t know how glad I am to see someone who knows me.”

“She is not more than twenty. Can it be that she was homesick for Berks County?” Louisa wondered.

“Don’t you think I am a good worker?” Eva urged, softly. As if she knew that there must be some fault-finding, and were anxious to get it over, she went hastily on. “I know what you think. I know. I had to go.”

“And now you want to go to Yost’s.”

“I am not a criminal. What sort of life had I among them? I went away, yes; but surely I can come back and live in this neighborhood, away from flashy people. I need not go on wandering about.”

Louisa saw something beautiful, which had taken a long while to reach perfection, about to be destroyed; it was the happiness of Christiana, her best friend. “I must say the right thing; I must not fail,” Louisa said to herself. “George took it very hard,” she began, deliberately.

“Where was he that night?”

“I don’t know. He never told me. I thought he would lose his mind surely. You would scarcely have recognized him. He did not go near Yost’s for weeks. He stayed here; and he has been very sick.”

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"He is at home now, isn't he? I must have a talk with him. Nothing is settled."

"George was away for years, but he never grew away from Yost's, he never wanted to live anywhere else. He can do a day's work now; and he is considering some plans which will make the estate much more valuable for the boy."

"Well? "

"You didn't want to stay there; you left the place. Why should you go back? "

"Why not? "

"Why don't you let those two alone, even if they have not treated you well? "

"She is a horrible person."

"Stay here and visit me a few days. I'll help you to get a start. And I'll bring your baby to see you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow I am going to Mount Misery."

"Very well. Go in the morning, and the baby will be here waiting for you."

The definiteness of the proposal was as soothing to Eva as Louisa's calm manner. "You are fair to me, and kind too. You always were," she said.

"Come to supper; and think this over."

"No. I am going to Yost's now; but —."

"Think it over," Louisa repeated. "Nobody can prevent you if you decide to go to your husband. See the flood for yourself, and then come back here."

"That may be all I can do," Eva admitted to herself as she went out.

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The stormy noises surrounded her; the water with its confused outcry compelled her to listen while she walked along. Lamps had been lit in many of the houses; Middleport looked very small and plain; the whole length of the street was quiet and without life under the leafless trees.

"I expected that when they saw me they would be very angry and then glad. Louisa is not angry, but she would not employ me, she would not have me there. Was I foolish to come home?" Eva thought. "Oh, I am going to see my baby! Will he know me?"

Suddenly she heard someone following her. She stopped in the light from the post-office windows and looked back. She began walking more quickly to escape, but Mary came up with her eyes sparkling.

"Good-evening," she said, pleasantly.

"Good-evening." Eva hurried on.

Mary kept beside her, and noted the altered quality of her beauty and her sophisticated composure. "You can't go far in this direction," she remarked.

"I know all about the flood. Louisa told me."

From a distance Mary had watched the life they were leading at Yost's, in their sunny rooms and fields, as the winter drew to an end; and she had no more part in it than she had in Paradise, but she would do all she could to keep it unspoiled. Now it was in Eva's two hard hands. Not doubting for a moment that if George saw her he would go with her, Mary longed to hold her back by force; but even before

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she came flying out of her house she realized that the most she could do was to delay the wanderer and hope that something fortunate would happen.

“Are you going to Yost’s?” she began.

“What does this little thing know? What has she been about?” Eva thought. She looked down searchingly at her companion, and replied, “Of course I am going to Yost’s.”

“Please don’t try it. The water is higher than you would think; it’s very dangerous.”

“You have a great idea of the mischief I can do.”

Eva laughed; and Mary felt that she was made to appear futile not only in what she was now trying to prevent but in her whole life. “Eva is not impressive, she is a nuisance,” she said to herself; and she kept patient. “You know how it went before,” she said. “You hated it. If you go back it will not be any better.”

“Does my father know how interested you are?”

“You think I am speaking on my own account.” Mary’s voice became more than usually clear as she went ahead. She was in a blaze. “I owe you no grudge at all. My future was determined before you were ever seen in Middleport.”

“Take care. I may come to Mount Misery.”

They walked on side by side through dark spaces and patches of yellow light. Mary did not answer. The name of Mount Misery recalled Dan’s decision, and she was thinking, “Where in the world can Eva go? To what kind of place? I didn’t realize that

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until now." It was an impelling thought to a warm-hearted woman; and her quick anger began to die down as she perceived how completely Eva, who had been the heart of things to all who loved her, was now shut out, barred out.

"Mustn't I go to Mount Misery either? You are my father's girl, aren't you?" Eva hoped this would be enough to drive Mary away.

"Don't go on tonight, don't!" Mary said, taking hold of Eva's arm in her eagerness.

"You must be out of your mind."

"Come home with me. I'll make you comfortable."

"Mary, please let me alone. I don't want to quarrel with you. I'm sorry I've hurt you."

"Is that from Eva?" Mary thought. This self-possessed, concise bitterness and Eva's altered looks must have the same cause, something that had been very hard and lonely to go through. The last few months, which brought all that about, had not been triumphant and gay. "You can stay with me as long as you like," she said.

Eva sharply demanded, "Did my father say I couldn't come home?"

"He looked for you everywhere."

Recalling that Louisa had seemed to expect her not to remain at Mount Misery, Eva understood what was implied without another question.

"My father — to protect my little sister — will not have me at home." Not at home, where she had been invaluable — to protect her sister, who had

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adored her. "So now I am nothing at Mount Misery. It can't be true. Yes, it may be."

The impulse to accuse Mary and not to believe her passed away; Eva felt sure that what she had guessed was true because it was so of a piece with everything else. The fact that her father would not shelter her was an overwhelming thing; she had taken it for granted that his love she would always have. She wanted to see his kind eyes.

"She is far more lonesome than I have ever been," Mary thought. "Won't you come?" she besought.

Eva went steadily on. After one more brief appeal which received no notice, Mary quietly desisted. She stood still, looking after the figure that disappeared down the dark street.

"Let her go to Yost's if she can get there. Let her have that satisfaction. There may be no harm done."

They had reached the end of the town. In a minute the few lights were behind Eva, and she was on the open road. It stretched ahead, deserted, silent, and almost impassable with slush and mud. Out there night had not yet come; dusk was at the point where all the remaining light seemed to be absorbed by the sky, and a faint brightness spread over its white, soft surface. Clouds obliterated the top of the Blue Mountain, to which there was no end, as it disappeared in mist. The fields were almost dark.

"Now I must go to Yost's," Eva thought. "I can't go back: I wouldn't if I could."

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What she had set out to do was hard; but the natures she had now to deal with were well known to her. That made it easier; and she was not sorry to be picking her way along the familiar road. It had been so unbearable everywhere while she was away — strange, unpleasant scenes, strange ways and faces. She had had to move about a good deal, but her lodgings had invariably been such that she was not sure whether she were looking at dinginess or real dirt. In her life with Beneval, whose interests were horses and cards, there had been nothing dazzling. None of the men with whom she was thrown seemed as if they were important in any locality, and the women made themselves bloom with paint. They all called her by Beneval's name; she knew that while they thought her pretty enough she appeared very dull among them.

“When I lived at Yost's I felt so bitter.”

Beneval had never said he loved her: that had been implied. He had said that if she went with him a divorce would be forthcoming, and they could be married. She had waited for that to happen. His occasional hours of courting were worth watching for, and she learned to comply that he might not cease to sue. When he looked at her she felt like an apple about to fall. She had finally questioned him and had been told that a long time must pass before anything could be done about their future, and she discovered that he thought her ridiculous in not getting along with Christiana. Only two nights had gone by since

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she threatened to leave him, after making up her mind for hours. He had answered that she had no choice; he was about to move again, and wanted no one depending on him.

The unshaded gas-light and close air, his courteous way, and the sounds of the money he counted out for her, all came back together. She had tried her best to be as cool as he, but there had been one moment of outbreak. He had put an end to that.

“ You have been with me longer than I expected.”

She could not bear to think of it; neither could she stop thinking of it.

“ He said that to me! And at the beginning I thought I might care for him.

“ George loved me; George wanted me.”

The air was not freezing but it penetrated. Though she got on as rapidly as she could through the mud, it seemed when she looked up at the great mountain wall that she made no progress. She thought how strange it was to have so much earth and such a vast and beautiful sky as background for little, painful lives. Not far away the church stood out white against the empty fields. A horse and carriage were at the gate, and she felt a stir of hope, for they were from Yost's, and if there were any luck left for her it would be to meet George there alone.

She went quietly into the churchyard and waited near the west door, which was open. She half hoped to hear him sing. The dusk was too far advanced for colors to appear, but when someone came through

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the darkness within the church and walked out toward her she recognized Christiana's figure, with what looked like a roll of music in her hand.

Christiana also saw who awaited her, and stopped. "I expected this, but not so soon," she thought.

There was a pause, filled with the noise of the freshet. Christiana had heard it all day, as she did every year. For her it was the overture to spring. That afternoon while she watched the water coming up her terrace inch by inch, and the rush of little waves past the bare willows, she had said to herself that the flood was no surer to decline than happiness; but she had never looked at the stream and felt so happy: the last few months were the best of her whole life.

"Good-evening," she said, civilly, and walked on.

Eva followed. Remembering how Beneval ridiculed her because she could not get on with her mother-in-law, she tried hard to speak in the right manner.

"Mrs. Stroh, will you tell me where George is?"

"At home."

"Shall I find him there now?"

"He missed some of the music he wants for church tomorrow, and very likely he is still upstairs looking for it. I thought I could find it here," Christiana answered, cheerfully.

"Can I cross the bridge?"

"The water ran through my carriage. I'm going back by the lower road."

Christiana was saying to herself, "It has come.

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George is lost to me, and I can bear it. I can bear it! ” She had dreaded this so long that for the first few minutes after it really happened she felt intense elation. Now her heart was free: now for the first time in her life she could deal unhampered with an enemy.

She knew exactly what she would do, but it was not yet quite time. After a polite pause she again walked away, and untied her hitching-strap. Eva, without a word, kept near her, standing about among the grave-stones. The air was beginning to be foggy, and the soaked earth looked gray-brown.

“ Where did you come from? ” Christiana asked.

Eva eagerly named her last halting-place.

“ Did you come that long way alone? You have a cool head. Where is Beneval Gartman? ”

“ I don’t know. We have parted.”

“ He has thrown her over,” Christiana thought. “ And he has not told what I paid him not to tell. She would not be so humble if she could spread the story about Paul.”

Eva said, “ I want to see George.”

“ No doubt you will succeed. You are very lucky.”

The hint in Christiana’s tone exposed a hope so private that Eva hardly admitted it to herself. “ I only want to arrange our affairs,” she said, indignantly.

Christiana scarcely noticed this. Her thoughts were dwelling for a moment upon the meeting that would take place. She knew well what George’s suspense was, remembering what her own had been; she also

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remembered her own strange, ignominious joy in Paul's presence, which had lasted to the very end.

"If George did take me back would it be unnatural?" Eva asked, as if the silence dragged it out of her. "I was driven away."

"Of course."

"I know that it all looks dreadfully bad; but he may not be hard on me even now. He is as kind as he can be."

"She does the most hateful things and then puts on injured airs," Christiana thought. "He wants to see you," she remarked, carelessly. "Why didn't you wait a little longer? He would have followed you."

"Followed me?"

"Now she is delighted. I should be secure if she were out of the world. Can it be possible that I have such a wish?" Christiana, appalled, considered this.

"I'll go to him," Eva said.

The time had arrived for Christiana to do what she meant to do. She proceeded, "You need not put yourself into danger at the bridge."

To that manner Eva gave a response very quickly. "I am coming to get my baby."

"So that's your weapon, as I expected?" Christiana thought. It had seemed to her that beside her grown son she had also her little son back, in the rosy baby with reddish, curly hair. She said, "You gave him to me."

"The law gives him to me. I found out that."

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“No judge would trust the child to you when he had been told what you are. Not to a woman leading your kind of life! I warn you, don’t come to Yost’s. I will not have you there. If you come you will be put off the place.”

Eva walked out of the churchyard and turned westward. After a minute she heard the carriage move off in the other direction. There was not a living creature in sight. She went fast, using all her energy to get over the toilsome ground which sent up wet exhalations. The mountain, a little duskier than the sky, appeared to move along with her.

“I would go to Yost’s now if the devil stood in the road.”

She began rapidly to plan what she would do. It was a disadvantage that Christiana would reach home before she could get there. The best way would be to walk around the house, see which rooms were lighted, and guess where George was to be found; then she could go to him very quietly. How she would wait among the bushes and watch her chance to slip in, how softly she would step — it was almost as vivid as though she were already going through it. She thought how his face would change when he looked up and recognized her.

“I am sure it has often seemed to him that he saw and touched me; and it was a day-dream: now this will be like a day-dream. It will be so good to be near him. I shall ask his pardon and offer him his freedom. I don’t think he will be hard. He was coming to find

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me. Suppose he despises me? I have done him the very worst injury I could. I may get to him without being noticed, though there are many chances against it, and then he may despise me. How can he do otherwise? I have a great deal to fight against. If his mother sees me there will be a dreadful scene. And if there is a miracle and he forgives me, what shall we do then? We shall be where we were, precisely where we were before I ran away from Yost's. I always run away."

She thought of their bickering at the Crossed Keys, and how they had drudged and been pinched for money. What she desired now was not at all less than what she had asked for vainly then. Presently another idea came into her mind, and she began to dwell on it. Yost's satisfied George; the beautiful, stately place suited him well. No gap was there, the three generations were together; it was complete.

"There is a great deal for him to lose.

"I am so tired."

A pungent freshness in the air increased, and before she expected it she found herself at the edge of the flood. She would not have recognized the Northkill. At this point it had spread out over the meadows, and grown so wide that the bridge appeared absurd, standing in the midst of a lake. The water looked deep. It was gray, reflecting the light from the sky, which seemed not to grow darker. Along the bed of the stream the flow was almost as fast as a man could run; the little waves turned from side to side and

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broke as they sped; a white ice-block floated past, then some black rubbish. Here near the mountain the groaning sound was very loud.

“Where can I go?”

Not to Mount Misery; her place there had vanished. To stay a few days at the Crossed Keys would be nothing, even though she saw her husband and her baby. That would make it worse. And it had been success in life for her to marry George Stroh! She could go to some town, and find work and a room with a gas-light.

Sighing because she was so tired, she looked slowly around. Here and there a few trees, bare and black, stood in the submerged fields; from the midst of the torrent rushing about the bridge rose a clump of naked white button-ball trees with branches flung wide. Large, grayish patches of foam had gathered where the water was quiet. An owl from the mountain flew by suddenly; she envied those broad wings.

She could scarcely move; but she stepped forward, and set her foot in a shallow. It felt cold as ice. A little farther on she sank so deep in slippery mud that she was afraid she could not pull herself out. The uprights of the snake-fences protruding high above the water looked like a double row of great horns, and she kept carefully between them. Earth and sky appeared unnatural as she gazed across the glossy gray expanse which surrounded her. The water gave and yielded to her movements; there was no support anywhere; the distance to the bridge seemed endless. To urge her

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limbs and push ahead against all that weight was the hardest thing she had ever done in her life. When at last, almost paralyzed with cold and with streams flowing from her clothing, she went up the incline of the bridge and supported herself against the stone wall along the side, she felt that the worst was over. She fancied that she could distinguish through the twilight the distant, dark mass of trees around the house at Yost's.

“I can still choose.”

The north wind was rising and blowing down from the black mountain; the vast cloud over the heavens had parted and become soft, floating clouds, touched with silver light from the unseen moon. Eva looked up at them. She was trembling; but suddenly she had forgotten the cold, and it was not a hard thing to lie down on the broad, low top of the wall. As she lay she could glance over the edge and see that the deep hole was under her, where so many spots of foam were running by. Feeling a desire to pray, she folded her hands. Then she turned over and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON EASTER afternoon Christiana and Louisa walked about in the sunshine inspecting the shrubs, and felt warm in their silk dresses. The burning-bush near the Georgian doorway was full of flowers with petals like red shells; tiny, numberless blossoms transformed the black-currant bushes into golden clouds with a heavenly fragrance. Neither the brown thrasher in the tree-top nor the redwing in the meadow could silence the wren. Down in the marshy places along the creek the little frogs were singing in chorus, on and on, to please themselves. Across ploughed fields and fields where the young oats were beginning to look green moved the shadows of clouds drifting up from the south and the pearl-colored horizon.

Christiana finished what she had to say: "So Eva went one way and I went the other."

After one sharp glance at her Louisa looked elsewhere.

"It was good of you to come today."

"I was here before, twice. Did you know it?" Louisa answered, glad to fill up the pause with something unimportant. "Once you were sleeping off a headache, and once you had gone to Reading."

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“That is the only time I have been away from home since that evening.”

“I thought you would like to talk it over with me after a while.” Louisa drew a lilac twig toward her, examined the leaf-buds, and released it. “You told Eva you would drive her off the place?”

“I did.”

“Would you have carried that out?”

“Yes.”

There was another pause. Christiana had decided that she could not do without Louisa any longer, no matter what criticism she might have to meet. Now she cried out, “You don’t know all of it.”

“Well?”

“That evening I sat and darned old table-cloths. They were almost too old to mend.”

“Mary sat alone embroidering; and I sat alone knitting, and pitying you from the bottom of my heart,” thought Louisa.

“George practiced an hour or more, hymns for that Sunday. There was something in his singing—I tell you it drove me wild! I knew he would go with her. I listened every minute for steps at the door, and her voice. I have gone through some awful waiting. When she didn’t come I hoped she had died. I understood it with myself that I wished for her death. I never grudged life to anyone before, although I have had reason. It lowered me; she brought me to that. I had no expectation that she would die,

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but I kept on wishing for it the next morning while I sat in church."

"You think she killed herself, don't you?"

"Yes."

"After you spoke to her she — ?"

"What I said I don't regret, for all her wicked foolishness. I have been expected to stand aside forever while others took what they desired. That had to end. Coming out of church we heard that some little boys had found a woman in your meadow where the flood had left her; and George went on the run. Of course he thought it was one of the neighbors who had been caught somehow by the water, but I was all but sure at once that it was Eva. I had been thinking only how good it would be if she died. I didn't put things together until he left me standing there in the churchyard; then I saw that when he knew I had met her, and what I said to her, he would hate me through and through."

"Well?"

"I felt that if the dead woman were Eva I must know instantly how it was to be between him and me. I drove home fast; and I went upstairs and shut my door, but I couldn't help hearing what the girls said when they came rushing back from church. What I dreaded so, the waiting to see what he would do to me, began then.

"He went straight to his room when he got home, and locked himself in. I stayed where I was. I thought he could avoid me or find me. A couple of

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hours went before I heard his step again, and it seemed that he was going to pass me by, but he did not. He had very little to say. He was determined to find out what brought Eva here, and how she came to die, and whether she had been ill-treated; he was going away as soon as he had buried her. Of course he meant that he was going in pursuit of Beneval Gartman."

Louisa listened, her eyes fixed upon Christiana with an intent and authoritative look.

"I wanted to say at once that he needn't go, because I could tell him all that. You don't know how I wanted to settle it between us quickly; but I kept quiet."

"Why did you? "

"Because I couldn't look at his face and utter what would make him more wretched still. Could I say to him, 'Eva was cast off. She was coming to take your son away. She killed herself'? I would have told him if the right time had come, but —."

"What has happened to you, Christiana? "

"I don't know. He has never mentioned Eva to me since, not once."

"What? What an unnatural thing! "

"He has not hinted that I met her, although I am sure he knows; and he has said nothing more about going away. I don't know what occurred that Sunday. How should I know? Should I hear it from strangers? "

"I'll tell you." Louisa proceeded as if she were

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very anxious to get through with it. "When the little boys came running I went myself, with three or four men who were about, to that ridge where my meadow joins the wheatfield. I saw Eva before they touched her. She lay like a long stone, in shallow water that just covered the winter wheat. I told them to bring her to my house; and they were carrying her along the road when George came tearing up, and met her face to face. He cried out, 'She isn't gone!'"

Christiana wrung her hands.

"He had courage. He seemed to think there was some hope, and he had the doctor there in five minutes. He saw her comfortable in their old room, in a beautiful night-gown of Mary's, with her curls almost dry, before he started for Mount Misery. He met Dan riding into Middleport, knowing nothing of what had happened. Dan came to me; and I persuaded him to leave Eva with me."

Louisa hesitated. In her pity for her old friend she half expected that Christiana would show a little pity for him.

"What about George?"

"When he returned from Yost's I made him sit down in the parlor and eat something. It was late then — about sunset. I think he fully realized that Eva was dead, and it gave him great energy. He was determined to go away."

"Do you know why he didn't go?"

"Because I told him what he wanted to know."

"You did?"

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“ I am glad, Christiana, that I have a different idea from yours about Eva and what happened that night. I talked with her before she started for Yost’s. She came to see George and the baby; she said nothing to me about taking the baby away. She was certainly alone — it was a satisfaction to George to know that — and she did not look poor or despairing. I told him I had urged her to visit me, and he was grateful. Since it was almost dark when she left my house, the night must have come down on her by the time she reached the bridge, and with the flood so loud and confusing it would have been easy to wander off the road into deep water.”

“ Don’t you believe that Beneval discarded her either? ”

“ There is fully as much reason to think that she left him. Didn’t she tell you she had? ”

“ After you had satisfied George, what did he do? ”

“ He went to Eva and stayed a long time.”

“ The day of the funeral he made no sign,” Christiana said, in a suppressed voice. “ I saw the hearse and two carriages going along the Blue Mountain road. Where did they bury her? ”

Louisa named the place absently, as though pre-occupied with recollections. “ The grave-yard is neglected; she lies beside her mother. The drive seemed long over the hills, but it was a sweet day, the sun came out so bright.”

“ Does she see nothing wrong in Eva? ” Christiana thought; and she tried hard to show no bitterness

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about the part her friend had played.

"I must be going now," Louisa said.

As they went cheerlessly toward the gate she thought, "How I wish Christiana had not put herself in the wrong! But it is done." She comprehended that her companion had been struggling for a long time in ways which she herself knew not at all; she grew conscious of supreme possibilities in life which were unknown to her. "If I think much about this I can't rest contented at the Crossed Keys," she reflected. Then she passed beyond all that, understanding that a precious intimacy was nearly lost.

"Christiana," she said, tenderly. "You and I must keep together. No one else can remember what we can."

"Louisa, it is dreadful how children can hurt us! "

"His affection has been the treasure of her life. Has she killed it herself?" Louisa thought. She ventured to say, "You have him with you."

"He is not with me." Christiana paused, then went on with goaded animation. "Sometimes I pretend that all this is not real, and that I am back in the past again, and happy. I pretend, you see, to have been happy; but I have never had anything, really. All that seemed to be mine slipped through my fingers."

"Is even her youth spoiled for her?" Louisa wondered, appalled. Again in need of the commonplace, she asked "Where is George now?"

"Away somewhere, perhaps at Mary's," Christiana

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said. She seemed too listless to speak connectedly. "There is more that I should know. He has some plan, I'm sure. He will never be satisfied, not until his way is clear to Beneval Gartman. Oh, Louisa, what I thought I could not bear one hour I have had to bear all this time — the waiting to see what he would do to me."

They walked on side by side. The idea passed through Louisa's mind that from the lilac-bush to the flag-stone path was a short distance, but in it she and Christiana had gone through much.

"It will be easier, now that I have told you," Christiana said, when they were taking leave of each other. "I know I must keep on waiting."

Louisa drove away. At the first curve in the road she looked back. A figure in gray was moving slowly between the flowery bushes toward the open door. Louisa had never so thoroughly understood pain to be an integral part of life, and she was sorry for all the living.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN Louisa reached home she stood on the front porch for some time, and looked across the way, but she could see nothing of Mary at any window. She felt anxious about her Mary, who had been a little surprising lately. Quite suddenly she had gone off to Philadelphia, to a cousin whom she had never visited before; and she had stayed away for weeks, coming back on Good Friday with some rather extravagant clothes. Louisa said to herself, without much connection, that it would not be at all like Mary to decline now to marry Dan, but love was as unstable as the misty, delicately colored clouds. After that conclusion she began to feel placid. A breeze caused a great deal of dancing among the young leaves and little shadows; the sunshine was almost silvery on the mountain-side; up there the chewinks were calling; the ridge seemed not a barrier but a guide to some beautiful place.

A horse cantered into view, and she discerned that the rider was Dan himself. What he had before him should not be delayed by any third person, she thought, and she disappeared instantly into the house.

Mary heard him; she had been listening for him, with a rather rapidly beating heart. On the dreadful

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Sunday morning when she ran to get away from the crowd out in the road she had locked herself into a shabby, melancholy room. Now the same room was airy, full of soft shadows, and everything was shining. Fresh curtains waved in the south wind; a sunbeam fell across a glass pitcher in which some scarlet tulips spread their polished petals wide. A little table was festively arranged with more red tulips, a bottle of wine, and a tall, smooth, white cake, such a cake as had never been seen in Middleport; in Philadelphia the recipe was a novelty. On the piano lay a spring hat, green, with a wreath of rose-leaves and dark red berries; it had been purchased in a mood of reckless gaiety, to wear with her new summer silk, which was finely checked garnet and silver gray.

Dan walked in quickly. He was much better dressed than usual, and looked large; he had the air of having attained a definite point, but she did not know what point. Since seeing him last she had pictured him in a number of ways, but none so impressive as this. She did not feel well acquainted with him.

“Did you have a good time?”

“I had a lovely time.”

He gazed at her as if he could never see enough of her. Evidently he did not mean to say anything more, so she began talking rapidly and telling him all about it, what she had seen, much about the pleasant cousin and her children.

“And I bought a few clothes,” she said, happily.

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“ I made a rule not to buy at first sight. I had to do that, for every time I went down town I saw something I wanted dreadfully.”

She was afraid he disapproved of her for laying aside her black, and she wished he would say her new dress was pretty; but he seemed to think that a genial expression was enough, and she went on talking. This time a concert was her subject.

“ The wind through bare branches, — the 'cello was like that. When the bows moved all together I thought of saplings bending their tops.”

With that kind of idea she impressed Dan as more exquisite than ever. The clearest thing to him about this concert was that she had not said who went with her.

A silence drew itself out to great lengths before Mary tried again. With more and more vivacity she told him that she had gone to the theatre twice.

“ And when the curtain went down I hardly knew where I was.”

Dan said he was glad she had enjoyed it. He made some other observation; and they kept on talking, with very little interest, for what seemed a long while. There came a depressing pause; she found him looking at her hard.

“ Mary, this is Easter.”

From her lovable, downcast eyes to her little feet she appeared as reserved as a mimosa-leaf closed at a touch.

“ Don't you want to live with me? ”

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Though several replies occurred to her she made none of them.

"I know my position is far from brilliant; there is nothing great ahead. You must not make a mistake," he said.

"He speaks of it as still open, even as though it were still open on his side," she thought, in the midst of her surprise.

"This looks like No."

"I don't know what to do," she said to herself. "Why do you say these things?" she composedly inquired.

Dan was certain now that while it was impossible to admit the facts he must act upon them. He answered, harshly, "I made up my mind after you went away that I would give you a chance. You want to be free, don't you?"

"And I was willing! I had come to that point!" Mary thought, with rage.

She kept a serene face as she drew off her little amethyst ring, laid it on the table, and folded her hands again in her lap.

Both felt as though there had been a terrific crash in the room; they did not know where to look, and found themselves mournfully regarding each other. This continued for some time.

When she felt obliged to put an end to it Mary walked over to the piano, and said, stiffly, "Do you like my hat?"

She did not pick up the green hat. There was a

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present for Dan under it, a pair of cuff-buttons in a white box; now he would never wear them. Her cousin had invited her to visit there again, with Dan, on their wedding-trip. There recurred to her mind several things she had planned to do, with Dan, at Mount Misery, in the evenings.

When he stood up, saying nothing but her name, she moved away so that he should not see her face. Not that there were any tears for him to see. After a moment she bravely glanced at him; he looked forsaken. He raised her hand to his lips and released it.

“Oh, you thought of George Stroh! I did care for him for a long while; but he always yielded, and I hated that. When I was with you I felt so safe. I changed little by little. Until Eva came back I was bitter; then it seemed as if something stubborn in me let go; and that ended it. What I felt afterward was for you alone. It was indeed. I couldn't depend on myself, so I went away; and I was so glad to get home. ‘I am going to marry Dan,’ I said to myself. I knew it was the one thing for me to do. Do you understand?”

“Am I the man you care for?”

“Yes.”

“Can you be satisfied at Mount Misery, with an old has-been?”

“You are a real man. I missed you so!”

“Oh, Mary, Mary, I will take good care of you!”

“Then you didn't want to break it off?”

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"Not I. I thought you did. After you went away everything was wrong. I got to thinking; it was more than I could stand. Well, we know now. If after this we doubt each other and trifle away our happiness we don't deserve it. Mary, you wouldn't have your ring, would you? Put it on."

He kept her hand with a teasing grip; he looked young.

Anxious to avoid too much emotion, she said, "Shall we take a walk now?"

He laughed at that. "When will you come?" he demanded. The date to which he finally agreed was only two weeks away.

After it was all settled Mary at last lifted the green hat. She was glad, as he admired the cuff-buttons, that there she had been really extravagant. They went into his safest pocket; and he thought, "With her little bit of money, that she earned with her own fingers!"

"Now will you go out on the hill?" she asked, joyously.

"Yes. Will it hurt that beautiful dress?"

In the street everything was pleasant. Children lagged on their way home from Sunday-school, young people were out; many Easter hats and dresses could be seen under the horse-chestnuts. The neighbors gave Dan and Mary friendly smiles without curiosity, their engagement having been known to everybody for a long time. There was no more making talk; they did not say much as they walked past the school-house

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and out of town, and followed a grassy lane which went winding between fields and up the mountain. Here the woodpecker darted, and the jay and the little finch, white and red and blue and yellow. The clouds were rising from the south over the remote blue, and Mary's eyes were allured farther and farther among the soft depths full of pearl-tinted light.

Dan said, "Mary, I am glad you were the last person Eva saw. The last voice she heard was yours."

"If I could have known that death was near, perhaps in the same hour when we were walking together!" she gently answered. "Why did I ever tell Eva? Oh, I wish I had nothing to conceal from him," she said to herself, with a sharp sense of imperfection. "But if he knew, it would be a sorrow to him all his life."

What he had thought innumerable times he was thinking now: "If Eva heard that I would not let her come home, that was what drove her into the water. There in the dark, all alone, she had a crying-fit, and then—. Now I know where she is," he said. "Mary, her awful last moments!"

Mary seized his hand and held it tight, keeping her eyes on the ground.

"Something was lost when she left the world," he continued, with pride. "Up to the very last she did as she chose." He added, slowly, "It would have been hard for her to grow old."

Presently he said, "I want to tell you, Mary, while

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you were away I went to Reading, and I hung around livery-stables and engine-houses and bar-rooms. Nobody could say where Gartman was. He seems to have dropped out. But half a dozen fellows, stock-dealers and horsemen, who move about constantly in the way of their business, offered to trail him. He is not exactly popular. There are three who are sure they can get him."

"Then what will you do? "

"Go after him on the first train. I want to come as near killing him as I can."

"Was there no clue in Eva's bag? "

"Very likely. There might be an envelope with a hotel letter-head, or an address printed on paper that she got at a dry-goods or millinery store. That would be enough. It isn't likely that he covered his tracks very long. But Louisa is stubborn about the bag: she says it belongs to George. Either he should have settled with Gartman or he should have had nothing to do with Eva, living or dead."

They had reached a high point. On one side the mountain rose steep and rocky, on the other it fell away. In the tranquil sunlight the cedars looked like green velvet with a gold bloom, and the shadows were soft on their trunks. Here and there appeared the bluish green of the ghostly juniper. Under them grew mosses, delicate little vines, some fern-shoots like furry interrogation-points, and patches of arbutus full of rosy stars.

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"I want some of these. No, I'll get them," Mary said, primly.

Dan offered his knife, and she took it though she did not need it at all; and she left him leaning against a tree, so still that a bird flew down to an ant-hill not twenty feet away. She needed a little solitude for her mind. Every way she looked there was something to make her happier. She had no petty doubts of Dan; and while there would still be difficulties in life she felt in quite a new relation to them. As to her fear of the future, and of being lonely and not useful to anybody, that was over. As the odors of the flowers and of the sweet earth came up into her face joy mounted in her like a wave.

"Memories I do not share have helped to make you what you are; but I am not jealous," she thought, as she went back to Dan.

He watched her coming with her arbutus in her hand, and what she felt was reflected in his face.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked.

"The years to come. Are you happy?"

"Very happy. Are you?"

"Yes."

Along the mountain-side a horse's trot could be heard a long way off. George, riding his tall bay, came in sight between the trees. He looked lean, and had a self-contained air which was new to him.

"Where did you come from?" he hailed Mary.

He questioned her about the concert, and wanted

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to know what was going on in the city. "I am glad I took this road," he said.

There was an unusual sound in his voice, a note of repression. Dan, in the background, glanced at him sharply, and thought, "Has he located Gartman?"

"George." Suddenly Mary went and stood close to his horse. The sunshine made her pretty dress lustrous, and lay across her face as she looked up. "A week from Saturday. Will you come?"

"Is that to be the day?" George asked, looking from one to the other.

"It will be very quiet. You will come?"

He was unmistakably glad, and congratulated them so warmly that it was difficult to know whether or not he promised to be at the wedding.

"Goodbye," he repeated, over his shoulder, as he moved away. "Isn't this Easter weather?"

Mary stood still where she was, in absorption, gazing far into the woodland. "How everything has changed!" she thought. "I am so happy; but poor George! — I am afraid Aunt Louisa will be lonely, with strangers living opposite," she said to Dan.

"We'll persuade her to visit us often. I've made you walk too far. You will be tired. Shall we go home now?"

Coming to join him, she let him know by her unclouded look that she turned away from all the rest of the world.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AS HE rode away George said to himself that Mary was a dear little woman; after that he thought no more about her. He let his horse walk, and kept looking at the hazy views between the cedars. He had been riding aimlessly like this for hours. Before the day was over a decision he had put off too long should be made. He still hoped for light, though there seemed to be none.

He arrived at the Crossed Keys after a while, and found Louisa reading a newspaper at the parlor window. In receiving him she displayed a calm and neutral manner.

"Aunt Louisa, will you invite me to supper? And I want to see Eva's bag."

"I don't know where he keeps his feelings; he certainly doesn't show them," Louisa thought. "I'll be glad to have you stay to supper," she admitted. "The bag is in your room. Eva left her purse with me, with the key in it. I'll get it."

The purse, a little pouch made of olive-green velvet with silk cord and tassels, was quite new; George thrust it away in his pocket. He hurried upstairs, opened the familiar door, went in, and locked it, keeping his back toward the bed.

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There was not much light in the room, the shades having been partly drawn at both windows, which faced the east. The red and blue stripes in the rag-carpet appeared dull. Everything was neat. Nothing on the walls except a wooden clothes-rack with china knobs, and on the bureau a crocheted cotton mat. George brought Eva's travelling-bag out of the closet, and opened her purse; beside the key he saw a headache powder, some change and seven dollars.

"Gartman didn't do so much better by her than I did. Now I have waited long enough. I will decide this; and reasonably, not by what I feel or guess at."

He sat down squarely in a straight chair.

"When I told Mother that Sunday that I was going away the one desire I had left was to settle with Gartman. I felt no shrinking."

He fixed his eyes on the white, flat bed with four brown cork-screw posts. On the Sunday afternoon when he shut himself in with Eva it had looked too cold for her to lie there. That he must have had some hope, even until then, had become evident when there was no more room for hope. He had felt as though fingers were working their way around his heart.

"But I was not crazy. Not then, nor at any time."

The linen that concealed her he had drawn away; there she lay among her curls. No terror at all was in her face; it wore a lovely look; and although immobile and not roseate she had not seemed cold.

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Her eyes were thoughtful; she might have closed them while considering some plan for him, she was so gracious.

“And I was to put her under the ground!”

Gradually it had become clear, perfectly clear, as he crouched beside her, that when she set out to come to him, death had not interrupted her journey, and she had come. Here were her own lips; and she herself was here too, with him. Her death made no difference between them. That was certain, even though the beauty there before him was unfamiliar and unearthly, even though she now knew the everlasting.

“She seemed to say, ‘Don’t you know that I am with you?’ I was blest then.” There was happiness now in going over and over it.

Her bruises had confronted him. They were there because he had failed as a protector; and he was punished. But Gartman! The last time he himself had seen her alive, here in this room, she was driven and desperate, and that was Gartman’s doing. He would never know what she had been made to suffer. He had said to himself that Gartman had not long to live.

“If I kill him she will leave me. She will not tell me any more than that. If she goes away how shall I ever get her back? What shall I do?”

As he thought and thought, and the time passed resultless, his body assumed a contorted posture and his face was thrust far forward.

“I doubt that any jury will convict me. I may

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not be able to get bail; that is the worst that is likely to happen. The boy is provided for in any case, and he will be glad his father acted as a man should. As to bringing disgrace on the family, Mother is the family. Mother met Eva when she had almost reached me, and said enough to break her heart. I know that. If Eva knew all that Gartman is responsible for she would not oppose me. I have not one thing that he has not spoiled. He began when we were children. For me to let him live is not decent. I am no man if I let him live, I am the worst kind of coward."

There before his glistening eyes was the bag. This was going to be easy. There would be something to indicate his enemy's whereabouts, enough to start the detectives. Wherever Gartman was, he would follow. It would be well to arrange a quarrel in public. It seemed that the whole thing could be done at one sweep.

"The trigger should be a little stubborn. I want to watch that face of his turn to wax."

He opened the bag violently, and saw some white garments, and a mirror which had often been in Eva's hand.

"If it had not been for him I might have had her with me all my life. I need her so."

But nothing tangible remained except her grave. About noon that day he had waited there, in the pale Easter sunshine; a scarlet tanager had poured out over and over his golden song.

"She came no nearer, though I stood and begged

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her for a sign I could not mistake. There was a fog before my mind. Is it so different from earth there that she can tell me nothing more? If I could see her for one minute! Oh, dear, beautiful, blessed spirit, look down on me here on the ground! Maybe she is nowhere. I am alone. I shall never see her again."

He threw himself across the bed. The unavoidable years, how they would pass, slow, bitter and empty!

"Starving! That's what it will be."

He felt rejected, lost and inexpressibly solitary. He opened his eyes and looked into the clay-colored dusk.

"Is this a delusion from the beginning, or truth? Shall I never have peace again after I kill Gartman? He goes free. Boasts, maybe. He ought to die. No. Not murder. But it is Gartman's time. Otherwise I couldn't do it. Each man's time is fixed. But I say, 'He is a law-breaker, let him perish.' Then I break the law. I wouldn't run. I swear I am not afraid. What then? I have touched what is sure and endless, what underlies all preaching and worship. I shall be cut off from that; I shall never know it again."

He was irresolute no longer.

Slowly the hard beating of his heart quieted; his fists relaxed; he lay still. Peace came as easily and amply as breath.

"Eva! Are you here?"

He knew he did not see her with his bodily eyes;

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but he could almost see her, radiant, with all storms and pain far behind her. Her loveliness was not at an end, her soul still was ardent. There would be no more separation. He understood her and was near to her as he had never been.

“To be free was the heart of all your desires; and you were kept in subjection all your life. You were mine at the last, weren't you, sweet? That is the wonderful thing.”

He lay quiet and felt happy. To be happy seemed natural.

CHAPTER XXIX

SOME time after sunset he heard Louisa calling him. He had lain there a long while. It seemed that instead of continuing to fight a heavy current he had turned and was going with the stream. He stood up, closed Eva's bag, and put it away where he had found it.

At the foot of the stairs he met Louisa waiting, with a lamp in her hand. She still wore her silk gown protected by a white apron with lace ruffles, and she had on carbuncle earrings. She was afraid she had been gruff to George.

"You're cold," she said. "Come and eat something. In the parlor, it's quieter."

"Aunt Louisa, you look very fine."

"Isn't this Easter? And you haven't been here for a long time."

Soft evening light came in through the south and west windows; the gilt roses on the walls and the red ones on the carpet bloomed unobtrusively. Louisa had decorated the table with black-current sprays in a white and gold vase shaped like a lily, and she moved it now to make room for her lamp. The glow on the white cloth and small yellow flowers was pleasant, George thought; everything he saw and

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tasted seemed novel and pleasant. Louisa was cordial and made him comfortable without saying much. She hoped for a chance to smooth matters for Christiana.

“George is a man again, but so much older,” she thought. “How thin his face would look if it were not for that silky beard.”

When supper was over he did not go, nor even move out of his chair, but clasped his hands behind his head and sat apparently contented, unconscious of her bright, kind eyes. She carried away the dishes and came back, and seated herself by the window; she too was contented. Wondering what she was to hear, whether about Beneval or Christiana, she waited, and watched the clouds. They were gray, with gold edges fading rapidly.

“Aunt Louisa,” he said, casually. “The next time Dan Hain comes here, give him that bag. Maybe Helen will want to use what is in it.”

“Very well.”

“What a coward I appear to her!” George thought. “Perhaps Gartman is already dead.”

Louisa asked no questions, and felt considerably excited. George was impelled to confide a little, and she was the only being in whom he could confide.

“I am going away before long,” he remarked.

“You are?”

“Yes. I have been considering various things,” he said, rather vaguely. “For some months I have had it in my mind that I should like to study medicine.”

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Very much pleased at being told, Louisa replied, "That will take a long time."

"Several years." He seemed about to forget her; then suddenly he turned all his attention to her. "I'm going to Philadelphia in a week or so, to find out the best way to begin. Perhaps I ought to read with a preceptor this summer. In the fall I'll go to the University. I think Father's money will be almost enough to take me through; and I'll find ways to earn more."

Louisa was astonished at the definiteness of these plans. She said, "I didn't know you wanted to be a doctor."

"I'd like to do anything I can for our neighbors here who have it hard. I'm not aiming to improve their souls," he declared, with something of a grin. "But I might cure a few of their aches and pains."

"Few ailments are really exciting to the doctor. It will be a great change for you."

"It will. After wearing good clothes all my life, and driving good horses, and doing nothing but what I pleased, it is time I stood up to a job."

"What about Yost's? How will it go there without you? "

"Better than now, I believe. Mother doesn't need an overseer; and by the time she wants to stop working, the boy will be grown; he will know all her ways."

"What! You are coming back, aren't you? "

"I can't stay at Yost's." He stopped, with a look

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entreating her to let that be enough on that subject. "I'll never own the place. If Mother wants the boy to have it I'll not interfere with his choice. I'll come back," he said, with enthusiasm. "I'll come back to Middleport; but I want to make my own way."

"And what about your mother?" Louisa demanded.

"I haven't told her yet. What has there been to say? I will tell her, I'll do it tonight," George answered, positively.

"He will make the right move toward her, and it will be only a form!" Louisa thought. She was filled with regret. "But he can't warm to her at any appeal from me." Without abruptness she said, "What you have to forget — do try to forget it."

"Mother is a great woman."

"There is indeed nothing to say, it seems," Louisa thought. "But there is something to look for as time goes on."

And George still had everything before him, she reflected. She was stirred. "I belong with Christiana. We have not so far to go, fewer hopes." She wished for risks not to be found at the Crossed Keys. "Well! If I had had such a son he would no doubt have left me by this time."

It seemed that George could not make up his mind to start for home; he went and stood at the south window. What had been established for him in the afternoon was like a background for his thoughts, and it was quite peaceful thinking.

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“Eva will not go far from me. I must earn my way to her.

“It may be only a dream; but let me keep it.”

Louisa asked, “You will not forget your music, will you? ”

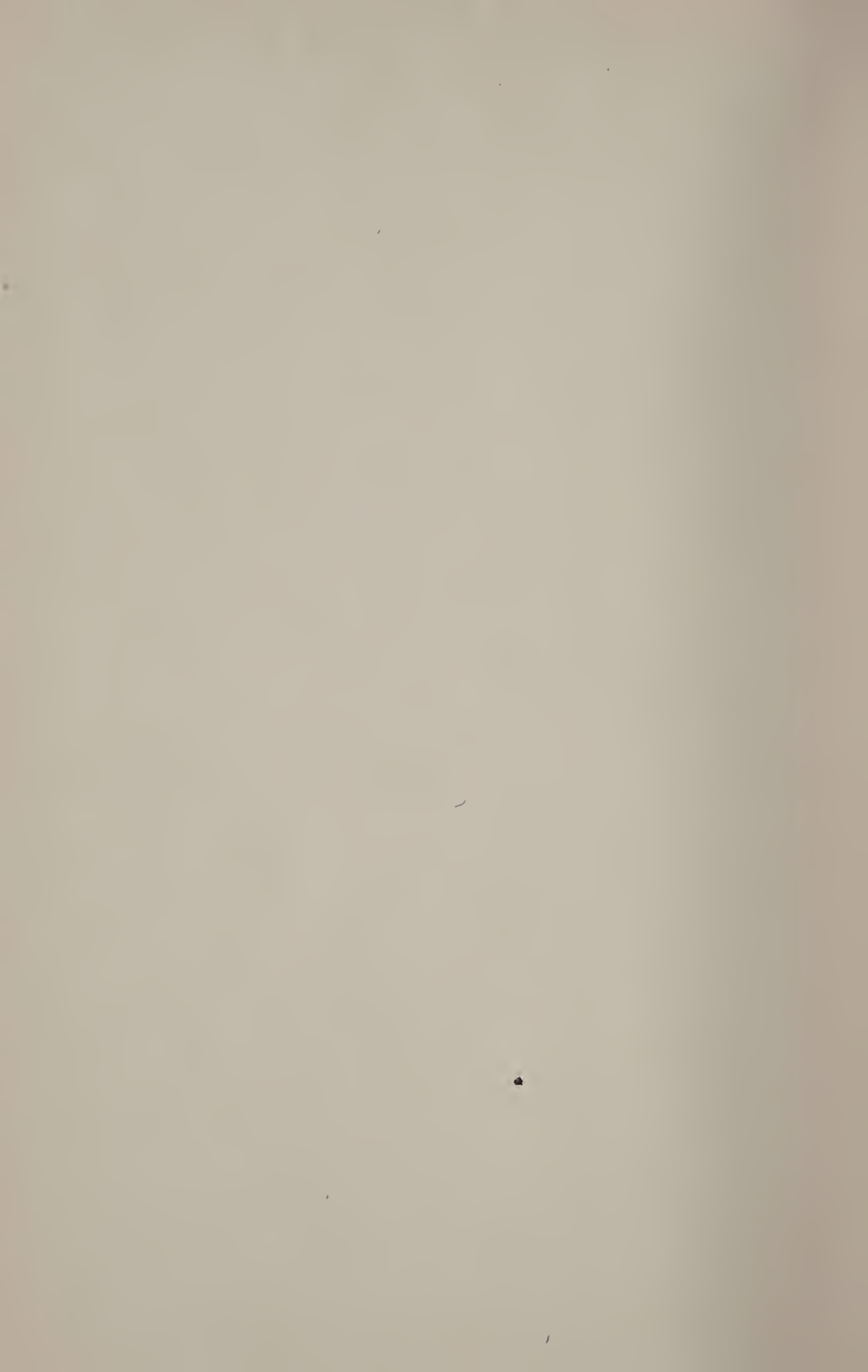
“No. I mean to see my teacher.”

“I wish you would make another song,” she suggested, with a sort of diffident tenderness.

“Perhaps I can.”

It was all he had to say, even to himself, concerning one not too definite, glorious hope. He wanted to sing and sing, and harmonies and phrases had begun to come into his head. He was aching, but he could go on, tonight and then tomorrow.

THE END



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